



THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

35¢

JANUARY

NIK: ONE REASON WHY WE LOST



THEODORE STURGEON

MARK CLIFTON



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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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COVER PAINTING BY MEL HUNTER

(*Vanguard satellite: in circle, firing of satellite; in square, Minitrack station; in oblong, 2nd stage suspended over 1st stage.*)

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The repercussions of Dr. R. S. Richardson's controversial article, The Day After We Land on Mars (F&SF, December, 1955), have not yet died away. In that article, you will recall, Dr. Richardson predicted that "we may be forced into first tolerating and finally openly accepting an attitude toward sex that is taboo in our present social framework. . . . To put it bluntly, may it not be necessary for the success of the project to send some nice girls to Mars at regular intervals to relieve tensions and promote morale?" No other article here has provoked so many pointed (and often heated) replies; and Poul Anderson and Miriam Allen de Ford indicated (May, 1956) some of the bugs in Richardson's "spaceborne bagnio." Now C. S. Lewis takes up the theme in (I believe) his first short story of space travel—a tale of the First Martian Expedition which is at once perceptive, human and unexpectedly comic.

Ministering Angels

by C. S. LEWIS

THE MONK, AS THEY CALLED HIM, settled himself on the camp chair beside his bunk and stared through the window at the harsh sand and black-blue sky of Mars. He did not mean to begin his "work" for ten minutes yet. Not, of course, the work he had been brought there to do. He was the meteorologist of the party, and his work in that capacity was largely done; he had found out whatever could be found out. There was nothing more, within the limited radius he could investigate, to be observed

for at least twenty-five days. And meteorology had not been his real motive. He had chosen three years on Mars as the nearest modern equivalent to a hermitage in the desert. He had come there to meditate: to continue the slow, perpetual rebuilding of that inner structure which, in his view, it was the main purpose of life to rebuild. And now his ten minutes' rest was over. He began with his well-used formula. "Gentle and patient Master, teach me to need men less and to love thee more." Then to it.

There was no time to waste. There were barely six months of this lifeless, sinless, unsuffering wilderness ahead of him. Three years were short . . . but when the shout came he rose out of his chair with the practised alertness of a sailor.

The Botanist in the next cabin responded to the same shout with a curse. His eye had been at the microscope when it came. It was maddening. Constant interruption. A man might as well try to work in the middle of Piccadilly as in this infernal camp. And his work was already a race against time. Six months more . . . and he had hardly begun. The flora of Mars, these tiny, miraculously hardy organisms, the ingenuity of their contrivances to live under all but impossible conditions—it was a feast for a lifetime. He would ignore the shout. But then came the bell. All hands to the main room.

The only person who was doing, so to speak, nothing when the shout came was the Captain. To be more exact, he was (as usual) trying to stop thinking about Clare, and get on with his official journal. Clare kept on interrupting from forty million miles away. It was preposterous, "*Would have needed all hands,*" he wrote . . . hands . . . his own hands . . . his own hands, hands, he felt, with eyes in them, travelling over all the warm-cool, soft-firm, smooth, yielding,

resisting, aliveness of her. "Shut up, there's a dear," he said to the photo on his desk. And so back to the journal, until the fatal words "*had been causing me some anxiety.*" Anxiety—oh God, what might be happening to Clare now? How did he know there was a Clare by this time? Anything could happen. He'd been a fool ever to accept this job. What other newly married man in the world would have done it? But it had seemed so sensible. Three years of horrid separation but then . . . oh, they were made for life. He had been promised the post that, only a few months before, he would not have dared to dream of. He'd never need to go to Space again. And all the bye-products; the lectures, the book, probably a title. Plenty of children. He knew she wanted that, and so in a queer way (as he began to find) did he. But damn it, the journal. Begin a new paragraph . . . And then the shout came.

It was one of the two youngsters, technicians both, who had given it. They had been together since dinner. At least Paterson had been standing at the open door of Dickson's cabin, shifting from foot to foot and swinging the door, and Dickson had been sitting on his berth and waiting for Paterson to go away.

"What are you talking about, Paterson?" he said. "Who ever said anything about a quarrel?"

"That's all very well, Bobby," said the other, "but we're not friends like we used to be. You know we're not. Oh, *I'm* not blind. I *did* ask you to call me Clifford. And you're always so stand-offish."

"Oh, get to Hell out of this!" cried Dickson. "I'm perfectly ready to be good friends with you and everyone else in an ordinary way, but all this gas—like a pair of school girls—I will not stand. Once and for all—"

"Oh look, look, look," said Pater-son. And it was then that Dickson shouted and the Captain came and rang the bell and within twenty seconds they were all crowded behind the biggest of the windows. A spaceship had just made a beautiful landing about a hundred and fifty yards from camp.

"Oh boy!" exclaimed Dickson. "They're relieving us before our time."

"Damn their eyes. Just what they would do," said the Botanist.

Five figures were descending from the ship. Even in space suits it was clear that one of them was enormously fat; they were in no other way remarkable.

"Man the air lock," said the Captain.

Drinks from their limited store were going round. The Captain had recognised in the leader of the strangers an old acquaintance, Ferguson. Two were ordinary young

men, not unpleasant. But the remaining two?

"I don't understand," said the Captain, "who exactly—I mean, we're delighted to see you all of course—but what exactly . . . ?" ✓ "Where are the rest of your party?" said Ferguson.

"We've had two casualties, I'm afraid," said the Captain. "Sackville and Dr. Barton. It was a most wretched business. Sackville tried eating the stuff we call Martian cress. It drove him fighting mad in a matter of minutes. He knocked Burton down and by sheer bad luck Burton fell in just the wrong position: across that table there. Broke his neck. We got Sackville tied down on a bunk but he was dead before the evening."

"Hadna he even the gumption to try it on the guinea pig first?" said Ferguson.

"Yes," said the Botanist. "That was the whole trouble. The funny thing is that the guinea pig lived. But its behaviour was remarkable. Sackville wrongly concluded that the stuff was alcoholic. Thought he'd invent a new drink. The nuisance is that once Burton was dead, none of us could do a reliable post mortem on Sackville. Under analysis this vegetable shows—"

"A-a-a-h," interrupted one of those who had not yet spoken. "We must beware of oversimplifications. I doubt if the vegetable substance is the real explanation. There are stresses and strains. You

are all, without knowing it, in a highly unstable condition, for reasons which are no mystery to a trained psychologist."

Some of those present had doubted the sex of this creature. Its hair was very short, its nose very long, its mouth very prim, its chin sharp, and its manner authoritative. The voice revealed it as, scientifically speaking, a woman. But no one had had any doubt about the sex of her nearest neighbour, the fat person.

"Oh, dearie," she wheezed. "Not now. I tell you straight I'm that flustered and faint, I'll scream if you go on so. Suppose there ain't such a thing as a port and lemon handy? No? Well, a little drop more gin would settle me. It's me stomach reelly."

The speaker was infinitely female and perhaps in her seventies. Her hair had been not very successfully dyed to a colour not unlike that of mustard. The powder (scented strongly enough to throw a train off the rails) lay like snow drifts in the complex valleys of her creased, many-chinned face.

"Stop," roared Ferguson. "Whatever ye do, dinna give her a drap mair to drink."

"E's no 'art; ye see," said the old woman with a whimper and an affectionate leer directed at Dickson.

"Excuse me," said the Captain. "Who are these—ah—ladies and what is this all about?"

"I have been waiting to explain," said the Thin Woman, and cleared her throat. "Anyone who has been following World-Opinion-Trends on the problems arising out of the psychological welfare aspect of interplanetary communication will be conscious of the growing agreement that such a remarkable advance inevitably demands of us far-reaching ideological adjustments. Psychologists are now well aware that a forcible inhibition of powerful biological urges over a protracted period is likely to have unforeseeable results. The pioneers of space travel are exposed to this danger. It would be unenlightened if a supposed ethicality were allowed to stand in the way of their protection. We must therefore nerve ourselves to face the view that immorality, as it has hitherto been called, must no longer be regarded as unethical—"

"I don't understand that," said the Monk.

"She means," said the Captain, who was a good linguist, "that what you call fornication must no longer be regarded as immoral."

"That's right, dearie," said the Fat Woman to Dickson, "she only means a poor boy needs a woman now and then. It's only natural."

"What was required, therefore," continued the Thin Woman, "was a bond of devoted females who would take the first step. This would expose them, no doubt, to obloquy from many ignorant per-

sons. They would be sustained by the consciousness that they were performing an indispensable function in the history of human progress."

"She means you're to have tarts, duckie," said the Fat Woman to Dickson.

"Now you're talking," said he with enthusiasm. "Bit late in the day, but better late than never. But you can't have brought many girls in that ship. And why didn't you bring them in? Or are they following?"

"We cannot indeed claim," continued the Thin Woman, who had apparently not noticed the interruption, "that the response to our appeal was such as we had hoped. The personnel of the first unit of the Woman's Higher Aphrodisio-Therapeutic Humane Organisation (abbreviated WHAT-HO) is not perhaps . . . well. Many excellent women, university colleagues of my own, even senior colleagues, to whom I applied, showed themselves curiously conventional. But at least a start has been made. And here," she concluded brightly, "we are."

And there, for forty seconds of appalling silence, they were. Then Dickson's face, which had already undergone certain contortions, became very red; he applied his handkerchief and spluttered like a man trying to stifle a sneeze, rose abruptly, turned his back on the company, and hid his face. He

stood slightly stooped and you could see his shoulders shaking.

Paterson jumped up and ran towards him; but the Fat Woman, though with infinite gruntings and upheavals, had risen too.

"Get art of it, Pansy," she snarled at Paterson. "Lot o' good your sort ever did." A moment later her vast arms were round Dickson; all the warm, wobbling maternalism of her engulfed him.

"There, sonny," she said, "it's goin' to be OK. Don't cry, Honey. Don't cry. Poor boy, then. Poor boy. I'll give you a good time."

"I think," said the Captain, "the young man is laughing, not crying."

It was the Monk who at this point mildly suggested a meal.

Some hours later the party had temporarily broken up.

Dickson (despite all his efforts the Fat Woman had contrived to sit next to him; she had more than once mistaken his glass for hers) hardly finished his last mouthful before he said to the newly arrived technicians:

"I'd love to see over your ship, if I could."

You might expect that two men who had been cooped up in that ship so long and had only taken off their spacesuits a few minutes ago, would have been reluctant to re-assume the one and return to the other. That was certainly the Fat Woman's View. "Nar, nar,"

she said. "Don't you go fidgetting, sonny. They seen enough of that ruddy ship for a bit, same as me. 'Tain't good for you to go rushing about, not on a full stomach, like." But the two young men were marvellously obliging.

"Certainly. Just what I was going to suggest," said the first. "OK by me, chum," said the second. They were all three of them out of the air lock in record time.

Across the sand, up the ladder, helmets off, and then:

"What in the name of thunder have you dumped those two bitches on us for?" said Dickson.

"Don't fancy 'em?" said the Cockney stranger. "The people at 'ome thought as 'ow you'd be a bit sharp set by now. Ungrateful of you, I call it."

"Very funny to be sure," said Dickson. "But it's no laughing matter for us."

"It hasn't been for us either, you know," said the Oxford stranger. "Cheek by jowl with them for eighty-five days. They palled a bit after the first month."

"You're telling me," said the Cockney.

There was a disgusted pause.

"Can anyone tell me," said Dickson at last, "who in the world, and why in the world, out of all possible women, selected those two horrors to send to Mars?"

"Can't expect a star London show at the back of beyond," said the Cockney.

"My dear fellow," said his colleague, "isn't the thing perfectly obvious? What kind of woman, without force, is going to come and live in this ghastly place—on rations—and play doxy to half a dozen men she's never seen? The Good Time Girls won't come because they know you can't have a good time on Mars. An ordinary professional prostitute won't come as long as she has the slightest chance of being picked up in the cheapest quarter of Liverpool or Los Angeles. And you've got one who hasn't. The only other who'd come would be a crank who believes all that bláh about the new ethicality. And you've got one of that too."

"Simple, ain't it?" said the Cockney.

"Anyone," said the other, "except the Fools at the Top could of course have foreseen it from the word go."

"The only hope now is the Captain," said Dickson.

"Look, mate," said the Cockney, "if you think there's any question of our taking back returned goods, you've 'ad it. Nothing doin'. Our Captain'll 'ave a mutiny to settle if he tries that. Also 'e won't. 'E's 'ad 'is turn. So've we. It's up to you now."

"Fair's fair you know," said the other. "We've stood all we can."

"Well," said Dickson. "We must leave the two chiefs to fight it out. But discipline or not, there are

some things a man can't stand. That bloody schoolmarm—"

"She's a lecturer at a Redbrick university, actually."

"Well," said Dickson after a long pause, "you were going to show me over the ship. It might take my mind off it a bit."

The Fat Woman was talking to the Monk. "... and oh, Father dear, I know you'll think that's the worst of all. I didn't give it up when I could. After me brother's wife died ... 'e'd 'av 'ad me 'ome with 'im, and money wasn't that short. But I went on, Gawd 'elp me, I went on."

"Why did you do that, daughter?" said the Monk. "Did you *like* it?"

"Well not all that, Father. I was never partikler. But you see—oh, Father, I was the goods in those days, though you wouldn't think it now ... and the poor gentlemen, they did so enjoy it."

"Daughter," he said, "you are not far from the Kingdom. But you were wrong. The desire to give is blessed. But you can't turn bad bank notes into good ones just by giving them away."

The Captain had also left the table pretty quickly, asking Ferguson to accompany him to his cabin. The Botanist had leaped after them.

"One moment, sir, one moment," he said excitedly. "I am a scientist.

I'm working at very high pressure already. I hope there is no complaint to be made about my discharge of all those other duties which so incessantly interrupt my work. But if I am going to be expected to waste any more time entertaining those abominable females—"

"When I give you any orders which can be considered *ultra vires*," said the Captain, "it will be time to make your protest."

Paterson stayed with the Thin Woman. The only part of any woman that interested him was her ears. He liked telling women about his troubles; especially about the unfairness and unkindness of other men. Unfortunately the lady's idea was that the interview should be devoted either to Aphrodisio-Therapy or to instruction in psychology. She saw, indeed, no reason why the two operations should not be carried out simultaneously; it is only untrained minds that cannot hold more than one idea. The difference between these two conceptions of the conversation was well on its way to impairing its success. Paterson was becoming ill-tempered; the lady remained bright and patient as an iceberg.

"But as I was saying," grumbled Paterson, "what I do think so rotten is a fellow being quite fairly decent one day and then—"

"Which just illustrates my point.

These tensions and maladjustments are bound, under the unnatural conditions, to arise. And provided we disinfect the obvious remedy of all those sentimental or—which is quite as bad—prurient associations which the Victorian Age attached to it—

"But I haven't yet told you. Listen. Only two days ago—"

"One moment. This ought to be regarded like any other injection. If once we can persuade—"

"How any fellow can take a pleasure—"

"I agree. The association of it with pleasure (that is purely an adolescent fixation) may have done incalculable harm. Rationally viewed—"

"I say, you're getting off the point!—"

"One moment—"

The dialogue continued.

They had finished looking over the spaceship. It was certainly a beauty. No one afterwards remembered who had first said, "Anyone could manage a ship like this."

Ferguson sat quietly smoking while the Captain read the letter he had brought him. He didn't even look in the Captain's direction. When at last conversation began there was so much circumambient happiness in the cabin that they took a long time to get down to the difficult part of their business. The Captain seemed at

first wholly occupied with its comic side.

"Still," he said at last, "it has its serious side too. The impertinence of it, for one thing! Do they think —"

"Ye maun recall," said Ferguson, "they're dealing with an absolutely new situation."

"Oh, *new* be damned! How does it differ from men on whalers, or even on windjammers in the old days? Or on the North West Frontier? It's about as new as people being hungry when food was short."

"Eh mon, but ye're forgettin' the new light of modern psychology."

"I think those two ghastly women have already learned some newer psychology since they arrived. Do they really suppose every man in the world is so combustible that he'll jump into the arms of any woman whatever?"

"Aye, they do. They'll be sayin' you and your party are verra abnormal. I wadna put it past them to be sending you out wee packets of hormones next."

"Well, if it comes to that, do they suppose men would volunteer for a job like this unless they could, or thought they could, or wanted to try if they could, do without women?"

"Then there's the new ethics, forbye."

"Oh stow it, you old rascal. What is new there either? Who ever tried to live clean except a

minority who had a religion or were in love? They'll try it still on Mars, as they did on Earth. As for the majority, did they ever hesitate to take their pleasures wherever they could get them? The ladies of the profession know better. Did you ever see a port or a garrison town without plenty of brothels? Who are the idiots on the Advisory Council who started all this nonsense?"

"Och, a pack o' daft auld women (in trousers for the maist part) who like onything sexy, and onything scientific, and onything that makes them feel important. And this gives them all three pleasures at once, ye ken."

"Well, there's only one thing for it, Ferguson. I'm not going to have either your Mistress Overdone or your Extension lecturer here. You can just—"

"Now there's no manner of use talkin' that way. I did my job. Another voyage with sic a cargo o' livestock I will not face. And my two lads the same. There'd be mutiny and murder."

"But you must, I'm—"

At that moment a blinding flash came from without and the earth shook.

"Ma ship! Ma ship!" cried Ferguson. Both men peered out on empty sand. The spaceship had obviously made an excellent take-off.

"But what's happened?" said the Captain. "They haven't—"

"Mutiny, desertion, and theft of a government ship, that's what's happened," said Ferguson. "Ma twa lads and your Dickson are awa' hame."

"But good Lord, they'll get Hell for this. They've ruined their careers. They'll be—"

"Aye. Nae dout. And they think it cheap at the price. Ye'll be seeing why, maybe, before ye are a fortnight older."

A gleam of hope came into the Captain's eyes. "They couldn't have taken the women with them?"

"Talk sense, mon, talk sense. Or if ye hanna ony sense, use your ears."

In the buzz of excited conversation which became every moment more audible from the main room, female voices could be intolerably distinguished.

As he composed himself for his evening meditation the Monk thought that perhaps he had been concentrating too much on "needing less" and that must be why he was going to have a course (advanced) in "loving more." Then his face twitched into a smile that was not all mirth. He was thinking of the Fat Woman. Four things made an exquisite chord. First the horror of all she had done and suffered. Secondly, the pity—thirdly, the comicality—of her belief that she could still excite desire; fourthly, her bless'd ig-

norance of that utterly different loveliness which already existed within her and which, under grace, and with such poor direction as even he could supply, might one day set her, bright in the land of brightness, beside the Magdalene.

But wait! There was yet a fifth note in the chord. "Oh, Master," he murmured, "Forgive—or can you enjoy?—my absurdity also. I had been supposing you sent me on a voyage of forty million miles merely for my own spiritual convenience."



Query for Doc Richardson

Will it work to send maidens to Mars,
Nice young ladies who fly to the stars
For the good of the Service?
Won't it make the boys nervous
When papa must pass out cigars?

M. CORWIN

Joseph Chamberlain Furnas' entry in WHO'S WHO is at once sensible and tantalizing. Its biographical information stops short with Mr. Furnas' graduation from Harvard (Phi Beta Kappa) in 1927; from that point—apparently on the not unjustifiable theory that an author's works are the only part of his life that need concern the public—it consists solely of a long list of published books. After two sensationably bestselling titles in the 1930's (SUDDEN DEATH and SO YOU'RE GOING TO STOP SMOKING), J. C. Furnas has established himself as one of America's top writers of popular non-fiction, in magazines and in books. He also writes, if much too infrequently, an occasional short story—and thus enables P&SF to carry on its tradition of bringing you a ghost story for Christmas, with this adroit modern variant on the spirit-that-cannot-rest-till-its-treasure-is-found.

Boyhood Pal

by J. C. FURNAS

YOU TALK ABOUT THESE OLD-TIME millionaires lighting cigars with hundred-dollar bills to show off. Well, I'm no show-off and I never been what you could call rich, but I'm way out ahead of that kind of caper. I mean sixteen years ago I lit a cigarette with a five-hundred-dollar bill and never regretted it. It don't matter if people know about it now. Nobody'll believe it, anyway.

I come from Callao, Indiana, which is a tank town on the Vandalia railroad, or was. The Vandalia was swallowed up years ago.

For all I know, Callao's gone too, but my hailing from there had a lot to do with this deal. I went to Chicago when I was seventeen and got a job in a wholesale-grocery concern called Blatch & Cummings. They got branches for three hundred miles around, and I moved up the ladder and traveled for them, checking up on local managers. Never married, just worked days and went out nights some, but never hooked up with any girl that got steady ideas same time I did.

Well, November, 1928, I had to

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go shoot some trouble in the Columbus branch. I disremember what the trouble was, but I never forgot much else about that trip. I left Chicago in Lower Two in a Pullman named Mt. Minnequama-gog, on the men's-washroom end, right over the wheels. They said it was coming on Thanksgiving and travel was heavy and I was lucky to get that. Not what I call luck.

Half an hour before we pulled out, I was on board and brushing my teeth and crawling into my nightshirt—I never been comfortable in pajamas yet—and bedding down for the night. I reckon I might of got to sleep and missed it all, only when they hooked the engine on, the engineer come back too heavy and gives us a shaking up that fetched me broad awake and sore about it. I was still wide awake and sore when we were already fifty miles on our way. I had a bottle in my grip—Canadian rye, stronger than most you got those times—so I had a snort and then another one, but it just made me wakefuller, like I had something bothering me but couldn't recollect what.

One trouble was the train noises—first a stretch of whacka-whacka-whacka-whacka and then a string of clicks and rattles that was worse. Usually those ordinary train noises don't trouble me ten cents' worth, but this stuff kind of latched on to my attention and pretty soon I

commenced hearing tunes in it, only the tune wouldn't stay put long enough to help you drowse off. It would start "Turkey in the Straw" and switch to "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" and then to "Marching Through Georgia," fit to drive you nuts. And then it seemed like it started sending Morse code.

I know Morse because when I was a kid, me and another kid next door named Myron Brinton, only we always called him Puggy, pooled our junk money and sent away for one of those Learn-to-be-a-telegrapher boys' layouts: two keys and some wire and dry cells and a code book. We rigged her up and sent stuff back and forth from each other's bedrooms. Puggy was smart but in a low-down kind of way and I don't know as I ever liked him exactly, but he was a couple of years older and always up to something and some ways I guess he was kind of a hero to me too. His call letters was MB and mine was TK, for Tom Knox, which is my name. And I reckon once you know Morse you never forget it, like swimming.

Well, these rattles on the train hit a Morse letter now and again—just V and some hash, then P and more hash and so on. Then over and over again, like these things they shake in rhumba orchestras, they started up: Da—daditda . . . Da—daditda . . . Da—daditda . . . And that's Morse for TK.

That's right, I thought: it was the whisky. I hadn't had much, but a little bad booze sometimes goes a long way. But the more I listened, the queerer it got, because the rattle even sent that TK with a little slur, just like Puggy used to. I never got up to a sending speed that would faze him, but he was always a sloppy sender compared to me.

Then I figured I was asleep and dreaming without knowing it, so I shook myself awake for sure, and the rattles kept right on sending. It seemed like the noise was back of the head of the bunk somehow. So I got into my pants and checked up, and what was back of the head of the bunk was the washroom wall and the steel closet where they keep sheets and towels. I prowled the men's room, and the only soul in it was the porter catching a nap. I was feeling kind of cool round my bare feet, but I stayed with it and woke him up and offered him a dollar to open up the closet, though it didn't seem reasonable there was any room in it for a practical joker.

He did it, but it was pretty plain he thought I was drunk or nuts, and I wasn't arguing the point; I just waved the dollar at him. And, like I expected, there wasn't any little green men in there sending Morse. There was nothing but stacks of linen.

When I got back in the bunk, the TK business had quit. But

naturally I sneezed as my cold feet warmed up and here it was again: Dadadit—dit—dididit—diditda—dadit—dadidit—didididit—dit—didit—da. And that's Morse for *Gesundheit*.

That finished me. I reached over to the window sill and tapped back with my middle fingernail, like handling a key: Dada—dadi—didit, meaning MB.

Puggy come right back—it was him, all right—with a stream of Morse that swamped me. I had to break in and send how I was rusty as an old gate and he always was a lousy sender and slow down! Then I did one of those double takes, like in the movies. Here I was, holding conversations with the rattles on a train.

He slowed and begun sending pretty clean code for him. First off he made it clear he was dead. "But I ain't in the other world," he says. "Seems to be one but I ain't there yet. I can't go there till I get something off my mind."

So I asked him where he was; I had to send it twice before he got it. I guess I was pretty jittery.

"Calm down, Tom," he says. "I ain't going to bite you. I'm too glad to see you. If you stay jumpy, I can't read you and I got no time to waste. Where am I? I'm right here in the bunk with you. You need a shave and you got on an old-fashioned nightshirt, like the hayseed you always was. But you don't feel crowded because I ain't

here in the flesh, like they say. And no squawks about its being your bunk because I been first citizen of this Lower Two for seven years and if anybody's an interloper it's you, see."

He said he'd died in 1921, when he was thirty. Seems he'd left home after I did and gone bad and turned professional gambler and done all right on long-distance trains sometimes and in joints sometimes and then when he was in France with the A.E.F., cleaning up on the boys paydays. He said he never asked for trouble with amateur stuff like marked cards but he never saw the beat of the second deal he developed. That fitted. He was always bragging himself up.

Well, this car had been on a Florida run in 1921 and Puggy and his partner had quarreled over money in the washroom and the partner had knifed him and he'd staggered out and fell into Lower Two and died there. "I been here ever since," he says. "When you're dead and got something on your mind, you stay where you died till you get it off. That's the rules. And that's where you come in, chum."

I said, "Why pick on me?" There must of been hundreds of people in that bunk in seven years.

"Ain't you my friend?" he says. "You're the first familiar face I seen since I got mine, boyhood pal." He sent that with a kind of

a sneer. "Besides, I ain't the kind of spirit that can moan or holler or talk right out. Some can, but I'm the rapping kind, and the run of these passengers don't know Morse. A couple of times I tried the regular spirit system, rapping the alphabet by numbers, five for E and thirteen for M and such, but it's too monotonous to catch their notice. They'd just go to sleep on me. I don't see how those uneducated spirits get anywhere with it."

I asked if the train crews didn't know Morse.

"They don't sleep in Pullman berths," he says. "Now, if I was haunting a house, maybe I'd get somewheres pounding and hammering, but nobody pays any attention to noises on trains. I been trying Morse on them all this time and I never found a one that knew code, barring an old fellow that begun to tumble five years ago and got so scared he threw himself off the train. They put it down to suicide. He never said yes or no, just skinned out of the bunk and out to the vestibule and wrestled the door open and dived out and broke his neck. Served him right," he says. "He didn't have no call to panic like that. I wasn't going to hurt him."

Well, about that point I got out my bottle, poison or not.

"I ain't had a drink since I died," Puggy says, sort of wistful. "But don't you go getting plastered. I

got a good proposition for you."

I asked him was it honest.

"Your end is," he says. "Anyway, you got no choice. I'm asking polite, like one pal to another, but you try saying no and see what happens to you."

His trouble was money and his wife. Seems he'd eloped with a Callao girl named Velma Burke in 1912—they'd started going together after my time—and she was kind of up against it after he got killed. She was working in a roadside place called Virgil's outside Lansing and getting along best she could and he wanted to see she was done right by. He wanted her to have a nest egg he'd stashed away that she didn't know about, and I was to go lift it and take it to her.

I asked him how he knew where she was and all if he couldn't leave Lower Two, and he blew up at me.

"Rot you," he says, "I don't want no questions. We got ways of knowing things. I never see her, but I know what her situation is. If I can just fix this up, I can have some peace," he says with a kind of a sigh. "I sure can use some after doing sixty thousand miles a year in this old crummy. Just back and forth and back and forth. Now, dry up, and here's your marching orders," he says. And he give them to me.

The cash—ten thousand dollars in big bills—was in a couple of

waxed flat-fifty cigarette tins nailed up inside a big hollow sycamore in the creek bottoms on the Cass place outside Lebanon, Michigan. "Biggest tree anywheres along," Puggy says. "Way high in the dark of the hollow." And he sends "Didditdadit—ditdit," which is "30" and means a sign-off.

I spent the rest of the night tapping, trying to raise him again, but I reckon he just squatted there and laughed at me. Between bad company and original cussedness he was a pretty mean lot. I didn't want any part of him or Velma Burke either. I remembered her. She was kind of an angelic knock-out to look at—green eyes and red hair and rose-petal skin, and blow-away slim—easy to fall for, I guess, if you didn't know her the way I did, from being in the same high-school class.

I wasn't likely to forget her, because she did me real low-down dirt once, whispered to me for an answer in a history test and I gave her my guess, which was it was Benedict Arnold shot Alexander Hamilton. It sounded reasonable to me, but it was wrong, and when it come up that way on both papers they had us both on the carpet and Velma made out she'd guessed wrong and she'd seen me peeking at her paper. And that was the girl I was to drop everything and do a big favor for.

Well, I wasn't much use to Blatch & Cummings in Columbus,

and I didn't sleep coming back next night, though I made sure the car wasn't Mt. Minnequama-gog but Polecat Springs. Then that Thursday, while I was still groggy inside, old J.M. Blatch told me to get over to Bay City and find out about spoilage trouble there with our canned beets. Yes, Bay City is in Michigan and Lebanon is close by. I was crazy enough to wonder if maybe Puggy and his spirit friends hadn't fixed it to spoil those beets.

I went. And, after I'd smelled enough sour beets to last a lifetime, I hired a car and spent the week end looking for the Cass place near Lebanon. And what beat me, being in the state of mind I was in, I couldn't get track of any Cass place within fifteen miles of that forsaken town. I didn't just check the courthouse records and then drive around aimless. I covered the local real-estate men and the editor of the paper and the oldest inhabitants. If anybody named Cass had so much as dickered for an acre of land near Lebanon since Methuselah's time, I'd of got wind of it.

So I was sure I was crazy. Only, on the train coming back to Chicago, I got a queer feeling on my right thigh like nothing I ever had before. And when I took my clothes off that night, there, neat as you please, in red on my skin, branding me like a steer, not to be rubbed off or washed off—I

found that out fast—was Puggy's call letters: Dash-dash—dash-dot-dot.

I still recollect how that place felt—not like a burn or an itch or a sting or a prickle, but more like the way you feel in the back of your neck when you suspect somebody is staring at you and you turn around and sure enough they are. It was real, all right. I should know. I lived with it for years.

I got salve from drugstores and goop from advertisements about "blotched skin" and "stubborn blemishes." I gave up swimming because I didn't want people to see it. Finally I took it to the best skin doctor I could hear tell of and gave him the story. He looked at my leg and said something about "interesting stigmata" and told me to come back Friday and he'd have a colleague there to look at it. Well, before Friday I looked up "stigmata" in the dictionary and it said stuff about "certain mental states, as in hysteria." So I never went back.

Next thing was to have it out with Puggy. So I wrote the Pullman outfit asking for sentimental reasons if they could locate me a car named Mt. Minnequama-gog, and they wrote back short but polite that there was no longer any such name on the list. That made sense. She was probably overdue for scrapping. But that letter disappointed me so I didn't hardly

bother to wonder where Puggy was hanging out, now that they'd put the blowtorch to his old home on wheels.

Always and forever I had that feeling in my leg, and it looked like there was no chance at all of ever getting rid of it. I took to drinking heavier and going out with people I'd never liked before. I hung on to my job, but it was plain that old J.M. had stopped thinking of me as a comer the way he had. And even though I knew Puggy's old car was gone for good, I worked up a creepy feeling about trains so strong I took to driving or flying wherever I had to go—planes were coming in by then. For years I never set foot in a railroad car.

But, come winter, 1935, I was stuck. Ice all over, and I had to testify in a lawsuit about a refused order in Evansville. The airport was snowed in; trains were still running, though. And every train was so jammed, the best I could get was Lower Two. The car was named Mountain Melody but even so you probably have a rough idea of how creepy I felt about it.

She had plenty of clicks for me to wince at and listen to. Then, right out of Englewood, as speed picked up, they come cold and clear: Dit-didit—ditda—da, and that's Morse for *rat*.

I just froze.

Dididididit — diditda — dadit —daditda, say the clicks, and that's Morse for *punk*.

I unfroze enough to work my nail on the sill. "This not your car," I sent. "What are you doing here?"

"My car, chum," says Puggy. "Renamed years ago. Some professor of Indian stuff noticed her and wrote the company did they know what Minnequamagog meant in Indian and they found out it was something you'd blush to chalk on a fence. How's your right leg, you double-crossing swindler?"

Well, it was jumping and pulsing awful, that's how it was. I could scarcely keep from hollering. But I got a grip on myself and sent him all about how I'd combed Lebanon, Mich., and finished up: "I'm not spook enough to make out how you figure I get your mark on me because you don't know what you're talking about. But I do know there's no Cass place in that end of Michigan."

No answer for a spell. Then very slow: "What state was that?"

I sent: Dada—didit—dit-didit —didididit meaning "Mich."

There was another long break, then a string of bad language sent sloppy but heartfelt, then: Didit-didit —dit-dit —diditda—ditdadit — dit-dit —dit-dit —da —didit—da —dididit —dada —didit —dididit —dididit, making: "You fool; it's Miss."

I might of known. Practically every state in the Union has a Lebanon, and Puggy's dots were always unreliable. The string of dots on the tail of Miss. could easy make Mich., if the sender was any-ways careless. Or maybe I read it wrong. That was Puggy's idea. I said it was his fault, and we had it backwards and forwards all the way to Terre Haute. I don't reckon any such language ever got into code since old man Morse invented it. But I didn't argue about what I did next. My leg was leaving me no choice but to hightail it for Lebanon, Miss., first chance.

Soon as I got back from Evansville, seeing thawing weather had cleared the highways, I told J.M. I had family trouble, borrowed a week against my 1936 vacation, and took out in my own car. With me went a big flashlight, a stout claw hammer, and a short step-ladder.

This time it was a breeze. The day I struck Lebanon, it rained cats and dogs, so there wasn't anybody much outdoors to wonder about me. Three questions located me the old Cass place—a played-out little cotton plantation five miles from town on miserable roads, with nobody living there. It took time, and I hadn't seen mud like that down along the creek since France in 1918. Raincoat or not, I got soaked to the skin. But here was my tree, big as a circus tent and hollow as a night-club

smile. And here were the cigarette tins, each with a big rusty nail through a corner. I sure was relieved. I could just see myself convincing Puggy they were gone.

It come to ten thousand dollars, like he said: six five-hundreds and seventy hundreds, all in those over-size, pre-Depression bills. They were going to cause comment at a bank, but I reckoned a story to fit could be cooked up when the time come.

I drove hard, but the weather was nasty and highways weren't what they are now, so I didn't make Lansing till afternoon the third day. The gas station I asked at said Virgil's had changed hands a while back but anyway it was the third joint on the right going north. That turned out to be a little eatery painted blue and white, very neat, and with a big sign: VELMA'S KITCHEN. No cars parked that time of day, no customers when I went in, which was fine. I was feeling good, even if I was kind of puzzled why Puggy thought Velma needed help so bad when it looked to me like she was doing all right.

Two girls in white uniforms were mopping up back of the counter, but what I was looking for was back of the cash register. Only it jolted me when I saw it. It was Velma all right, blazing red hair and bright green eyes and even the complexion pretty fair yet, but in her white uniform

she was big as a house. In all those years she'd got a build like a plunging fullback—no fat but plenty of muscle on a solid frame. I just stood and gaped at her.

After a while she says, kind of hard: "All right, what are you selling?"

I took off my hat and come close, beginning to think about what I should of been thinking about before—how was I going to get any sane woman to swallow my story?" "Velma," I says, "don't you know me?"

One look down and one look up and she says no and bit it off sharp too.

"I'm Tom Knox," I says. So she looked again.

"Well," she says after a while, "I guess you could be, at that. Little Tom Knox," she says, "still sneaking round after people. How'd you know where I was?"

"Puggy told me," I says.

"Puggy!" she says. "He's been dead fourteen years. What is this, anyway?"

"I know he's dead," I says. "He told me that too."

Well, if you can imagine a Short-horn bull looking scared, that was Velma for a couple of split seconds. But she got hold of herself quick and begun to look like that bull fixing to charge. I don't know yet just how she'd muscled Virgil out and taken over, but then and there I begun to feel sorry for him.

"Tom," she says, "I never had

much opinion of you, but I wouldn't of thought you'd go crazy. What are you talking about? And, what's more, I want to know how you got here. I'm through with Callao and everybody that ever come from there—through for keeps. And I don't want—"

I busted in on her. "I'm sane as you are," I says, "and I haven't been in Callao since before you and Puggy left town. Keep quiet and I'll tell you how I got here."

I felt like a fool, but I hoped the wad of money would put some backbone in it, so I stood there like a bad boy in front of teacher and sang her my song, short enough so she wouldn't lose patience and low enough so the counter girls wouldn't hear. Things looked just rough enough so I took the precaution of not giving details of where I lived or where I worked. It seemed like a good idea at the time but I didn't know till later just how good.

She frowned heavy and heavier right along, which was no help, and neither was the way Puggy's mark on my leg was heating up, just the way it had on the train. About halfway through my story she reached under the cash register and got out a Colt .38 and laid it handy, and I was willing to believe without being shown that she could handle it. But I kept on swinging my jaw and finished by passing her a Manila en-

velope jam-full of Puggy's spook-money.

She took it and pulled the wad out halfway and says: "I thought this was a racket. Real money isn't this big."

I explained and told her she was plenty old enough to remember the old-size currency. She glared at me and says: "All right, now, on the level, where'd you get it?"

"Velma," I says, "I been telling you. If you got the time, I can run through it again but it won't make it sound any better."

"Oh, no," she says, pushing the wad back in again. "I take no money from lunatics or crooks that can't think up better yarns than that. It's a new wrinkle to me, but I'm not buying. Get out," she says, "and take this bait with you, Tom Knox. The one thing I'm sure of about you is you aren't drunk."

Well, it was all right by me if she was going to suspect herself out of ten thousand dollars—not that I couldn't see her point under the circumstances—but I knew I was branded for life if I couldn't get shut of Puggy's orders. I did everything but get down on my knees to her, and I'd of done that if it wouldn't of alarmed the girls behind the counter. Finally I asked if she'd believe me if she saw the marks on my leg. She said she'd bet every dollar in that envelope, if it was real money, that

nobody but me *could* see those marks.

"I can't cover all that without long odds," I says. "But I'll bet you five hundred, even money, those marks are there and you can see them." I saw her eyes flicker. "Velma Burke," I says, "you take me where I can get my pants off and you got a bet on your hands."

"Let's see the dough," she says, "and not in this stage money, either."

Well, just in case, I'd cashed a thousand before I started south, so I could cover, though I don't generally carry such amounts. She looked my five hundred over, tucked it into the envelope, put it in the cash register, and picked up the gun. I started to duck, but all she did was call over the counter: "Girls, I'm going into the stock room with this character. If you hear me scream or shoot, call Sergeant Mickle. If I'm not out in ten minutes, call him anyway."

The girls gulped, but one of them says, "OK, Velma." I took it what Velma said went around there, few questions asked.

"And if you don't think I'll get quick service," Velma says to me, "Sergeant Mickle is my fiancé and the barracks is only three quarters of a mile."

"He must like 'em big," I says, too sore at her to use good sense when it came to the backchat.

"He does," she says, "and he'd

make two and a half of you. Now, we'll see about that bet."

So she covered me with the gun, backed toward the door, opened it behind her, backed in, and I followed, keeping well away so she wouldn't get nervous with that cannon. When I closed the door behind me, she was fifteen feet away at the other end of the stock room, against a background of cold cereals and canned corned-beef hash—our own brand, too. Well, I sure needed something to make me feel at home.

"Take 'em off," she says, motioning with the gun.

I did. I felt kind of screwily pleased. I always been choosy about my shorts, even if I do wear nightshirts. Then I out with my right leg, like a girl in a ballet, and twisted sidewise so she could see. She breathed in sharp and come closer.

"Could be a burn," she says.

"You nor nobody else ever saw a burn like that," I says. "And it isn't lipstick or barn paint or ketchup or sealing wax. And it's gnawing at me like I can't tell you."

"Well," she says, kind of quavery, "my folks were Irish. I got a right to be some superstitious." She was breathing awful fast. "You mean to tell me," she says, "that Puggy Brinton went to all that trouble to see I got his last ten thousand dollars?"

"That's what I mean," I says.

"Well, Tom," she says, "you were a no-account kind of kid but you weren't a liar. I guess I believe you." And the moment she said that, the marks plumb vanished and the gnawing quit. "They're gone," she says. "But I did see them."

"You sure did," I says.

"I guess it's worth it, having to believe my own eyes," she says, and then come out of it fast. "The money!" she says, and drops the gun and dives for the door.

I come along out when I had my pants back on. She was counting it slow and careful. My stake and a five-hundred-dollar bill was already laid to one side for me. I took it. "I might mention," I says, "that this party's cost me about three hundred dollars in travel expenses. Never mind the time out of my vacation," I says.

She didn't even look up from counting.

"On your way," she says. "I got no time for childhood friends that know I was married to a gambler. And don't forget the friends I got around here wear police uniforms."

So I skipped warning her about how the bank might get inquisitive about that stack of old-time money. I just put on my hat and was on my way, like she suggested.

Two days later, I was driving to Racine, up U. S. 41, with the

radio on, and the noon news says: "Mrs. Velma Brinton, of rural Lansing, Michigan, has been held for questioning because ten thousand dollars in old-time currency that she brought her bank for deposit proved to carry serial numbers showing the bills are part of the loot that an unidentified mob took from the Briggs National Bank of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in March, 1920. Mrs. Brinton's fiancé, Police Sergeant Herman Mickle, says their engagement is off unless she can think of a better story than she has so far managed to give authorities. Previously known as an active committeewoman in local politics and a successful businesswoman, Mrs. Brinton may not be extradited on account of the statute of limitations, but she has already stated she plans to leave town when released. The money will be turned over to the insurance company which—"

And right away, I picked up a rattle somewhere down below the dashboard and it turned into Puggy, like I more than half expected. "Well, Tom," he says, "that does it. We sure fixed her wagon, didn't we?"

I didn't say anything. I was still trying to take the thing in.

"Did I know that was hot money?" Puggy sends, kind of singing it. You can put a lot of expression in Morse if you try. "I sure did. I won it shooting crap with Big John and he was look-

out man for the mob that knocked over the Briggs National and I done it with honest dice because I was scared to try anything. Did I know she was going to marry a John Law? I sure did, boyhood pal, I sure did."

I answered back on the steering column.

"Nice guy you are, planting that kind of trouble on your widow just because she's getting married."

"My widow!" he says. "My poor, bereaved widow. I'd never of been in that kind of crap game except for her. I'd just been home to the little flat in Detroit, Tom. And the furniture was still there, what was too big to carry away convenient. But she wasn't—and neither was the seventeen thousand dollars I'd left with her to keep for us against a rainy day. I was down to my last hundred when I went up against Big John. And I was mad. I been mad ever since. But now I got my own back."

"That kind of makes a cat's-paw out of me," I says.

"It sure does," says Puggy. "You were just made for the job, Tom, always were. Thanks, boyhood pal. I'm loose now. I can be on my way. Don't ask me where, but I reckon it's a good thing I always liked warm climates." And he signed off.

Which is why I lit a cigarette with a five-hundred-dollar bill there on the shoulder of U. S. 41.

One advantage of the writer's life is that any experience, no matter how vexatious it seems at the time, may eventually serve as story material. A few winters back, Cyril Kornbluth was Assistant Curator of the Tioga Point Historical Society Museum. . . .

The Events Leading Down to the Tragedy

by C. M. KORNBLUTH

DOCUMENT ONE

Being the First Draft of a Paper to be Read before the Tuscarora Township Historical Society by Mr. Hardeigne Spoyntie, B.A.

Madame President, members, guests:

It is with unabashed pride that I stand before you this evening. You will recall from your perusal of our Society's *Bulletin* (Vol. XLII, No. 3, Fall, 1955, pp. 7-8) [pp correct? check before making fair copy. HS] that I had undertaken a research into the origins of that event so fraught with consequences to the development of our township, the Watling-Fraskell duel. I virtually promised that the cause of the fatal strife would be revealed by, so to speak, the spotlight of science [metaphor here suff. graceful? perh. "magic"]

better? HS]. I am here to carry out that promise.

Major Watling *did* [tell a lie] prevaricate. Colonel Fraskell rightly reproached him with mendacity. Perhaps from this day the breach between Watlingist and Fraskellite may begin to heal, the former honestly acknowledging themselves in error and the latter magnanimous in victory.

My report reflects great credit on a certain modest resident of historic old Northumberland County who, to my regret, is evidently away on a well-earned vacation from his arduous labors [perh. cliché? No. Fine phrase. *Stet!* HS]. Who he is you will learn in good time.

I shall begin with a survey of known facts relating to the Watling-Fraskell duel, and as we are all aware, there is for such a quest no starting point better than the

monumental work of our late learned county historian, Dr. Donge. Donge states (*Old Times on the Oquanantic*, 2nd ed., 1873, pp 771-2): "No less to be deplored than the routing of the West Brance Canal to bypass Eleusis was the duel in which perished miserably Major Elisha Watling and Colonel Hiram Fraskell, those two venerable pioneers of the Oquanantic Valley. Though in no way to be compared with the barbarous *blood feuds* of the benighted Southern States of our Union, there has persisted to our own day a certain division of loyalty among residents of Tuscarora Township and particularly the Borough of Eleusis. Do we not see elm-shaded Northumberland Street adorned by *two* gracefully pillared bank buildings, one the stronghold of the Fraskellite and the other of the Watlingist? Is not the debating society of Eleusis Academy sundered annually by the proposition, 'Resolved: that Major Elisha Watling (on alternate years, Colonel Hiram Fraskell) was no gentleman'? And did not the Watlingist propensities of the Eleusis Colonial Dames and the Fraskellite inclination of the Eleusis Daughters of the American Revolution 'clash' in September, 1869, at the storied Last Joint Lawn Fête during which éclairs and (some say) tea cups were hurled?" [Dear old Donge! Prose equal Dr. Johnson!]

If I may venture to follow those stately periods with my own faltering style, it is of course known to us all that the controversy has scarcely diminished to the present time. Eleusis Academy, famed *alma mater* (i.e., "foster mother") of the immortal Hovington* is, alas, no more. It expired in flames on the tragic night of August 17, 1901, while the Watlingist members of that Eleusis Hose Company Number One which was stabled in Northumberland Street battled for possession of the fire hydrant which might have saved the venerable pile against the members of the predominantly Fraskellite Eleusis Hose Company Number One which was then stabled in Oquanantic Street. (The confusion of the nomenclature is only a part of the duel's bitter heritage.) Nevertheless, though the Academy and its Debating Society be gone, the youth of Eleusis still carries on the fray in a more modern fashion which rises each November to a truly disastrous climax during "Football Pep Week" when the "Colonels" of Central High School meet in sometimes gory combat with the "Majors" of North Side High. I am privately informed by our

**vide* Spoynte, H.: "Egney Hovington, Nineteenth-Century American Nature Poet, and his career at Eleusis Academy, October 4—October 28, 1881" (art.) in *Bull. of the Tuscarora Township Hist. Soc.*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Winter, 1929, pp. 4-18.

borough's Supervising Principal, George Croud, Ph.B., that last November's bill for replacement of broken window panes in both school buildings amounted to \$231.47, exclusive of state sales tax; and that the two school nurses are already "stockpiling" gauze, liniment, disinfectants and splints in anticipation of the seemingly inevitable autumnal crop of abrasions, lacerations and fractures. [mem. Must ask Croud whether willing be publ. quoted or "informed source." HS] And the adults of Eleusis no less assiduously prosecute the controversy by choice of merchants; the granting of credit, and social exclusiveness.

The need for a determination of the rights and wrongs in the *affaire* Fraskell-Watling is, clearly, no less urgent now than it has ever been.

Dr. Donge, by incredible, indeed almost impossible, labor has proved that the issue was one of *veracity*. Colonel Fraskell intimated to Joseph Cooper, following a meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati, that Major Watling had been, in the words of Cooper's letter of July 18, 1789, to his brother Puntell in Philadelphia, "drauin [drawing] the long Bow."*

O fatal indiscretion! For Puntell Cooper delayed not a week to "relay" the intelligence to Major Watling by post, as a newsy ap-

pendix to his order for cordwood from the major's lot!

The brief, fatally terminated correspondence between the major and the colonel then began; I suppose most of us have it [better change to "at least key passages of corresp." HS] committed to memory.

The first letter offers a tantalizing glimpse. Watling writes to Fraskell, *inter alia*: "I said I seen it at the Meetin the Night before Milkin Time by my Hoss Barn and I seen it are you a Athiest Colonel?" It has long been agreed that the masterly conjectural emendation of this passage proposed by Miss Stolp in her epoch-making paper† is the correct one, *i.e.*: "I said at the meeting [of the Society of the Cincinnati] that I saw it the night before [the meeting] at milking time, by my horse barn; and I [maintain in the face of your expressions of disbelief that I] saw it. Are you an atheist, colonel?"

There thus appears to have been at the outset of the correspondence a clear-cut issue: did or did not Major Watling see "it"? The reference to atheism suggests that "it" may have been some appar-

*DONGE, Dr. J.: *supra*, p. 774, n.

†STOLP, A. DeW.: "Some Textual Problems Relating to the Correspondence between Major Elisha Watling and Colonel Hiram Fraskell, Eleusis, Pennsylvania, July 27—September 1, 1789" (art.) in *Bull. of the Tuscarora Township Hist. Soc.*, Vol. IV, No. i, Spring, 1917.

tion deemed supernatural by the major, but we know absolutely nothing more of what "it" may have been.

Alas, but the correspondents at once lost sight of the "point." The legendary Watling Temper and the formidable Fraskell Pride made it certain that one would sooner or later question the gentility of the other as they wrangled by post. The fact is that both did so simultaneously, on August 20, in letters that crossed. Once this stone was hurled [say "these stones"? HS] there was in those days no turning back. The circumstance that both parties were simultaneously offended and offending perplexed their seconds, and ultimately the choice of weapons had to be referred to a third party mutually agreeable to the duelists, Judge E. Z. C. Mosh.

Woe that he chose the deadly Pennsylvania Rifle!* Woe that the two old soldiers knew that dread arm as the husbandman his sickle! At six o'clock on the morning of September 1, 1789, the major and the colonel expired on the sward behind Brashear's Creek, each shot through the heart. The long division of our beloved borough into Fraskellite and Watlingist had begun.

After this preamble, I come now to the modern part of my tale. It begins in 1954, with the purchase of the Haddam property by our respected fellow-townsmen, that

adoptive son of Eleusis, Dr. Gaspar Mord. I much regret that Dr. Mord is apparently on an extended vacation [where *can* the man be? HS]; since he is not available [confound it! HS] to grant permission, I must necessarily "skirt" certain topics, with a plea that to do otherwise might involve a violation of confidence. [Positively, there are times when one wishes that one were *not* a gentleman! HS]

I am quite aware that there was an element in our town which once chose to deprecate Dr. Mord, to question his degree, to inquire suspiciously into matters which are indubitably, his own business and no one else's, such as his source of income. This element of which I speak came perilously close to sullying the hospitable name of Eleusis by calling on Dr. Mord in a delegation afire with the ridiculous rumor that the doctor had been "hounded out of Peoria in 1929 for vivisection."

Dr. Mord, far from reacting with justified wrath, chose the way of the true scientist. He showed this delegation through his laboratory to demonstrate that his activities were innocent, and it departed singing his praises, so to speak. They were particularly enthusiastic about two "phases" of his work which he demonstrated: some sort of "waking anaesthesia" gas, and a

*Amusingly known to *hoi polloi* and some who should know better as the "Kentucky" Rifle.

mechanical device for the induction of the hypnotic state.

I myself called on Dr. Mord as soon as he had settled down, in my capacity as President of the Eleusis Committee for the Preservation of Local Historical Buildings and Sites. I explained to the good doctor that in the parlor of the Haddam house had been formed in 1861 the Oquanantic Zouaves, that famed regiment of daredevils who with zeal and dash guarded the Boston (Massachusetts) Customs House through the four sanguinary years of conflict. I expressed the hope that the intricate fretsaw work, the stained glass, the elegant mansard roof and the soaring central tower would remain mute witnesses to the martial glory of Eleusis, and not fall victim to the "remodeling" craze.

Dr. Mord, with his characteristic smile (its first effect is unsettling, I confess, but when one later learns of the kindly intentions behind it, one grows accustomed to his face) replied somewhat irrelevantly by asking whether I had any dependents. He proceeded to a rather searching inquiry, explaining that as a man of science he liked to be sure of his facts. I advised him that I understood, confidently mentioning that I was no stranger to scientific rigor, my own grandfather having published a massive *Evidences for the Phlogiston Theory of Heat*.^{*} Somehow the interview concluded with Dr.

Mord asking: "Mr. Spoynte, what do you consider your greatest contribution to human knowledge and welfare, and do you suppose that you will ever surpass that contribution?"

I replied after consideration that no doubt my "high water mark" was my discovery of the 1777 Order Book of the Wyalusing Militia Company in the basement of the Spodder Memorial Library, where it had been lost to sight for thirty-eight years after being misfiled under "Indian Religions (Local)." To the second part of his question I could only answer that it was given to few men twice to perform so momentous a service to scholarship.

On this odd note we parted; it occurred to me as I wended my way home that I had not succeeded in eliciting from the doctor a reply as to his intentions of preserving intact the Haddam house! But he "struck" me as an innately conservative person, and I had little real fear of the remodeler's ruthless hammer and saw.

This impression was reinforced during the subsequent month, for the doctor intimated that he would

^{*}Generally considered the last word on the subject, though, as I understand it, somewhat eclipsed at present by the flashy and mystical "molecular theory" of the notorious Tory sympathizer and renegade Benjamin Thompson, styled "Count" Rumford. "A fool can always find a bigger fool to admire him." [Quote in orig. French? Check source and exact text. HS]

be pleased to have me call on him Thursday evenings for a chat over the coffee cups.

These chats were the customary conversations of two learned men of the world, skimming lightly over knowledge's whole domain. Once, for example, Dr. Mord amusingly theorized that one of the most difficult things in the world for a private person to do was to find a completely useless human being. The bad men were in prison or hiding, he explained, and when one investigated the others it always turned out that they had some redeeming quality or usefulness to somebody. "Almost always," he amended with a laugh. At other times he would question me deeply about my life and activities, now and then muttering: "I must be sure; I must be *sure*"—typical of his scientist's passion for precision. Yet again, he would speak of the glorious Age of Pericles, saying fervently: "Spoynthe, I would give anything, do anything, to look upon ancient Athens in its flower!"

Now, I claim no genius inspired my rejoinder. I was merely "the right man in the right place." I replied: "Dr. Mord, your wish to visit ancient Athens could be no more fervent than mine to visit Major Watling's horse barn at milking time the evening of July 17, 1789."

I must, at this point, [confound it! I am *sure* Dr. M. would give per-

mission to elaborate if he were only here! HS] drop an impenetrable veil of secrecy over certain episodes, for reasons which I have already stated.

I am, however, in a position to state with absolute authority *that there was no apparition at Major Watling's horse barn at milking time the evening of—*

[Steady on, Hardeign. Think. Think. Major W. turned. I looked about. No apparitions, spooks, goblins. Just Major W. and myself. He looked at me and made a curious sort of face. No. Nonono. Can't be. Oh, my God! I was the—Fault all mine. Duel, feud. Traitor to dear Eleusis. Feel sick. . . . HS]

DOCUMENT TWO

Being a note delivered by Mrs. Irving McGuinness, Domestic, to Miss Agnes DeW. Stolp, President, the Tuscarora Township Historical Society

"The Elms"

Wednesday

Dear Miss Stolp,

Pray forgive my failure to attend the last meeting of the Society to read my paper. I was writing the last words when—I can tell you no more. Young Dr. Scantt has been in constant attendance at my bedside, and my temperature has not fallen below 99.8 degrees in the past 48 hours. I have been, I

am, a sick and suffering man. I abjectly hope that you and everybody in Eleusis will bear this in mind if certain facts should come to your attention.

I cannot close without a warning against that rascal, "Dr." Gaspar Mord. A pledge prevents me

from entering into details, but I urge you, should he dare to rear his head in Eleusis again, to hound him out of town as he was hounded out of Peoria in 1929. *Verbum sapientibus satis.*

Hardeign Spoynte

Recommended Reading

It's agreeable (to me at least, and to other desegregationists) to find two established lines of monthly science fiction books both offering unalloyed fantasy as their (appropriately) October selections. Publishers have been shying away from book-length imaginative fiction which could not be identified, however remotely, with science; let's hope that both these new novels are markedly successful (as they deserve to be) and thus clear the path for more books in the wondrous and unforgettable tradition of *Unknown Worlds*.

L. Sprague de Camp's *SOLOMON'S STONE* (Avalon, \$2.75) comes, indeed, directly from *Unknown* (June, 1942) with little revision or expansion, although it bears only a 1957 copyright. Switched from his material to his astral body by a shrewd demon, our hero finds the astral plane inhabited by the dream-

figures which the Walter Mittys of our plane have created for themselves—which makes for a colorful, unpredictable and perilous world. Slighter and sketchier than de Camp's *LEST DARKNESS FALL OR THE WHEELS OF IF*, it's still a lively and entertaining adventure-cum-satire.

Philip K. Dick's *THE COSMIC PUPPETS* (Ace, 35¢) is from *Satellite* (1956) but gratifyingly in the *Unknown* manner. When you return to the small town of your birth and find the streets and people completely changed and an 18-year-old obit of yourself in the files of the local paper—well, it is, to say the least, an eerie situation, and Mr. Dick develops it with agreeable/grue and chilling hints of the cosmic battle between Good and Evil.

Last-minute insertion of the timely article on Sputnik killed this department's usual space. More books next month.

A. B.

In the past year or so Gordon R. Dickson has been appearing more frequently in these pages (with eight stories in the past fifteen issues) than any other writer; but his stories are so varied (from straight space travel through farce-satire to fantasy adventure) that he keeps seeming like a different author each time—like a good repertory actor who seeks to create a series of memorable characters rather than to impress his own personality on the audience. This time Mr. Dickson is the delicate and sensitive observer of human-alien relationships on a remote planet, and of the universal meaning of the spirit of Christmas.

The Christmas Present

by GORDON R. DICKSON

"WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?" ASKED Harvey.

"It's the time when they give you presents," Allan Dumay told him. Allan was squatted on his mudshoes, a grubby figure of a little six-year-old boy, in the waning light over the inlet, talking to the Cidorian. "Tonight's Christmas Eve. My daddy cut a thorn tree and my mother's inside now, trimming it."

"Trimming?" echoed the Cidorian. He floated awash in the cool water of the inlet. Someone—perhaps it was Allan's father—had named him Harvey a long time ago. Now nobody called him by any other name.

"That's putting things on the tree," said Allan. "To make it beautiful. Do you know what beautiful is, Harvey?"

"No," said Harvey. "I have never seen beautiful." But he was wrong—even as, for a different reason, those humans were wrong who called Cidor an ugly swamp-planet because there was nothing green or familiar on the low mudflats that rose from its planet-wide fresh-water sea—only the stunted, dangerous thorn tree and the trailing weed. There was beauty on Cidor, but it was a different beauty. It was a black-and-silver world where the thorn trees stood up like fine ink sketches against the

cloud-torn sky; and this was beautiful. The great and solemn fishes that moved about the uncharted pathways of its seas were beautiful with the beauty of large, far-traveled ships. And even Harvey, though he did not know it himself, was most beautiful of all with his swelling iridescent jelly-fish body and the yard-long mantle of silver filaments spreading out through it and down through the water. Only his voice was croaky and unbeautiful, for a constricted air-sac is not built for the manufacture of human words.

"You can look at my tree when it's ready," said Allan. "That way you can tell."

"Thank you," said Harvey.

"You wait and see. There'll be colored lights. And bright balls and stars; and presents all wrapped up."

"I would like to see it," said Harvey.

Up the slope of the dyked land that was the edge of the Dumay farm, reclaimed from the sea, the kitchen door of the house opened and a pale, warm finger of light reached out long over the black earth to touch the boy and the Cidorian. A woman stood silhouetted against the light.

"Time to come in, Allan," called his mother's voice.

"I'm coming," he called back.

"Right away! Right now!"

Slowly, he got to his feet.

"If she's got the tree ready, I'll

come tell you," he said, to Harvey.

"I will wait," said Harvey.

Allan turned and went slowly up the slope to the house, swinging his small body in the automatic rhythm of the mudshoes. The open doorway waited for him and took him in—into the light and human comfort of the house.

"Take your shoes off," said his mother, "so you don't track mud in."

"Is the tree all ready?" asked Allan, fumbling with the fastenings of his calf-high boots.

"I want you to eat first," said his mother. "Dinner's all ready." She steered him to the table. "Now, don't gulp. There's plenty of time."

"Is Daddy going to be home in time for us to open the presents?"

"You don't open your presents until morning. Daddy'll be back by then. He just had to go up-river to the supply house. He'll start back as soon as it's light; he'll be here before you wake up."

"That's right," said Allan, solemnly, above his plate; "I shouldn't go out on the water at night because that's when the water-bulls come up in the boat and you can't see in the dark."

"Hush," said his mother.

"Hush," said his mother.

"Hush," said his mother.

"Hush," said his mother.

"Hush," said his mother.

"Hush now, and eat your dinner. Your daddy's not going out on the water at night."

Allan hurried with his dinner.

"My plate's clean!" he called at last. "Can I go now?"

"All right," she said. "Put your plate and silverware into the dishwasher."

He gathered up his eating utensils and crammed them into the dishwasher; then ran into the next room. He stopped suddenly, staring at the thorn tree. He could not move—it was as if a huge, cold wave had suddenly risen up to smash into him and wash all the happy warmth out of him. Then he was aware of the sound of his mother's footsteps coming up behind him; and suddenly her arms were around him.

"Oh, honey!" she said, holding him close, "you didn't expect it to be like last year, did you, on the ship that brought us here? They had a real Christmas tree, supplied by the space lines, and real ornaments. We had to just make do with what we had."

Suddenly he was sobbing violently. He turned around and to her. "—not a—Christmas he managed to choke out. sweetheart, it is!" He felt soothing the rumpled tread. "It isn't how it think about it, to us. What the loving

and the giving—not how the Christmas tree looks; or how the presents are wrapped. Don't you know that?"

"But—I—" He was lost in a fresh spate of sobs.

"What, sweetheart?"

"I—promised—Harvey—"

"Hush," she said. "Here—" The violence of his grief was abating. She produced a clean white tissue from the pocket of her apron. "Blow your nose. That's right. Now, what did you promise Harvey?"

"To—" He hiccupped. "To show him a Christmas tree."

"Oh," she said, softly. She rocked him a little in her arms. "Well, you know honey," she said, "Harvey's a Cidorian; and he's never seen a Christmas tree at all before. So this one would seem just as wonderful to him as that tree on the space ship did to you last Christmas."

He blinked and sniffed and looked at her doubtfully.

"Yes, it would," she assured him gently. "Honey—Cidorian's aren't like people. I know Harvey can talk and even make pretty good sense sometimes—but he isn't really like a human person. When you get older, you'll understand that better. His world is out there in the water and everything on land like we have it is a little hard for him to understand."

"Didn't he *ever* know about Christmas?"

"No, he never did."

"Or see a Christmas tree, or get presents?"

"No, dear." She gave him a final hug. "So why don't you go out and get him and let him take a look at the tree. I'll bet he'll think it's beautiful."

"Well . . . all right!" Allan turned and ran suddenly to the kitchen, where he began to climb into his boots.

"Don't forget your jacket," said his mother. "The breeze comes up after the sun goes down."

He struggled into his jacket, snapped on his mudshoes and ran down to the inlet. Harvey was there waiting for him. Allan let the Cidorian climb onto the arm of his jacket and carried the great light bubble of him back into the house.

"See there," he said, after he had taken off his boots with one hand and carried Harvey into the living room. "That's a Christmas tree, Harvey."

Harvey did not answer immediately. He shimmered, balanced in the crook of Allan's elbow, his long filaments spread like silver hair over and around the jacket of the boy.

"It's not a real Christmas tree, Harvey," said Allan. "But that doesn't matter. We have to make do with what we have because what makes Christmas is the loving and the giving. Do you know that?"

"I did not know," said Harvey.

"Well, that's what it is."

"It is beautiful," said Harvey. "A Christmas tree beautiful."

"There, you see," said Allan's mother, who had been standing to one side and watching. "I told you Harvey would think it was beautiful, Allan."

"Well, it'd be more beautiful if we had some real shiny ornaments to put on it, instead of little bits of foil and beads and things. But we don't care about that, Harvey."

"We do not care," said Harvey.

"I think, Allan," said his mother, "you better take Harvey back now. He's not built to be out of the water too long, and there's just time to wrap your presents before bed."

"All right," said Allan. He started for the kitchen, then stopped. "Did you want to say good night to Harvey, Mommy?"

"Good night, Harvey," she said.

"Good night," answered Harvey, in his croaking voice.

Allan dressed and took the Cidorian back to the inlet. When he returned, his mother already had the wrapping papers in all their colors, and the ribbons and boxes laid out on his bed in the bedroom. Also laid out was the pocket whetstone he was giving his father for Christmas and a little inch-and-a-half-high figure he had molded out of native clay, kiln-baked and painted to send home to Allan's grandmother and

grandfather, who were his mother's parents. It cost fifty units to ship an ounce of weight back to Earth, and the little figure was just under an ounce—but the grandparents would pay the freight on it from their end. Seeing everything ready, Allan went over to the top drawer of his closet.

"Close your eyes," he said. His mother closed them, tight.

He got out the pair of work gloves he was giving his mother and smuggled them into one of the boxes.

They wrapped the presents together. After they were finished and had put the presents under the thorn tree, with its meager assortment of homemade ornaments, Allan lingered over the wrappings. After a moment, he went to the box that held his toys and got out the container of toy spacemen. They were molded of the same clay as his present to his grandparents. His father had made and fired them, his mother had painted them. They were all in good shape except the astro-gator, and his right hand—the one that held the pencil—was broken off. He carried the astro-gator over to his mother.

"Let's wrap this, please," he said.

"Why, who's that for?" she asked, looking down at him. He rubbed the broken stump of the astro-gator's arm, shyly.

"It's a Christmas present . . . for Harvey."

She gazed at him.

"Your astro-gator?" she said. "How'll you run your spaceship without him?"

"Oh, I'll manage," he said.

"But, honey," she said. "Harvey's not like a little boy. What could he do with the astro-gator? He can't very well play with it."

"No," said Allan. "But he could keep it. Couldn't he?"

She smiled, suddenly.

"Yes," she said. "He could keep it. Do you want to wrap it and put it under the tree for him?"

He shook his head, seriously.

"No," he said. "I don't think Harvey can open packages very well. I'll get dressed and take it down to the inlet and give it to him now."

"Not tonight, Allan," his mother said. "It's too late. You should be in bed already. You can take it to him tomorrow."

"Then he won't have it when he wakes up in the morning!"

"All right, then," she said. "I'll take it. But you've got to pop right into bed, now."

"I will." Allan turned to his closet and began to dig out his pajamas. When he was securely established in the warm, blanket-ing field of the bed, she kissed him and turned out everything but the night light.

"Sleep tight," she said, and taking the broken-armed astroga-

tor, went out of the bedroom, closing the door all but a crack behind her.

She set the dishwasher and turned it on. Then, taking the astrogator again, she put on her own jacket and mudshoes and went down to the shores of the inlet.

"Harvey?" she called.

But Harvey was not in sight. She stood for a moment, looking out over the darkened night country of low-lying earth and water, dimly revealed under the cloud-obscured face of Cidor's, nearest moon. A loneliness crept into her from the alien land and she caught herself wishing her husband was home. She shivered a little under her jacket and stooped down to leave the astrogator by the water's edge. She had turned away and was half-way up the slope to the house when she heard Harvey's voice calling her.

She turned about. The Cidorian was at the water's edge—halfway out onto the land, holding wrapped up in his filaments the small shape of the astrogator. She went back down to him, and he slipped gratefully back into the water. He could move on land, but found the labor exhausting.

"You have lost this," he said, lifting up the astrogator.

"No, Harvey," she answered. "It's a Christmas present. From Allan. For you."

He floated where he was with-

out answering, for a long moment. Finally:

"I do not understand," he said.

"I know you don't," she sighed, and smiled a little at the same time. "Christmas just happens to be a time when we all give gifts to each other. It goes a long way back . . ." Standing there in the dark, she found herself trying to explain; and wondered, listening to the sound of her own voice, that she should feel so much comfort in talking to only Harvey. When she was finished with the story of Christmas and what the reasons were that had moved Allan, she fell silent. And the Cidorian rocked equally silent before her on the dark water, not answering.

"Do you understand?" she asked at last.

"No," said Harvey. "But it is a beautiful."

"Yes," she said, "it's a beautiful, all right." She shivered suddenly, coming back to this chill damp world from the warm country of her childhood. "Harvey," she said suddenly. "What's it like out on the river—and the sea? Is it dangerous?"

"Dangerous?" he echoed.

"I mean with the water-bulls and all. Would one really attack a man in a boat?"

"One will. One will not," said Harvey.

"Now I don't understand you, Harvey."

"At night," said Harvey, "they come up from deep in the water. They are different. One will swim away. One will come up on the land to get you. One will lie still and wait."

She shuddered.

"Why?" she said.

"They are hungry. They are angry," said Harvey. "They are water-bulls. You do not like them?" She shuddered.

"I'm petrified." She hesitated. "Don't they ever bother you?"

"No. I am . . ." Harvey searched for the word. "Electric."

"Oh." She folded her arms about her, hugging the warmth in to her body. "It's cold," she said. "I'm going in."

In the water, Harvey stirred.

"I would like to give a present," he said. "I will make a present."

Her breath caught a little in her throat.

"Thank you, Harvey," she said, gently and solemnly. "We will be very happy to have you make us a present."

"You are welcome," said Harvey.

Strangely warmed and cheered, she turned and went back up the slope and into the peaceful warmth of the house. Harvey, floating still on the water, watched her go. When at last the door had shut behind her, and all light was out, he turned and moved toward the entrance to the inlet.

It appeared he floated, but ac-

tually he was swimming very swiftly. His hundreds of hair-like filaments drove him through the dark water at amazing speed, but without a ripple. Almost, it seemed as if the water was no heavy substance to him but a matter as light as gas through which he traveled on the faintest impulse of a thought. He emerged from the mouth of the inlet and turned upriver, moving with the same ease and swiftness past the little flats and islands. He traveled upriver until he came to a place between two islands where the water was black and deep and the thorn bushes threw their sharp shadows across it in the silver path of the moonlight.

Here he halted. And there rose slowly before him, breaking the smooth surface of the water, a huge and frog-like head, surmounted by two stubby cartilaginous projections above the tiny eyes. The head was as big as an oil drum, but it had come up in perfect silence. It spoke to him in vibrations through the water that Harvey understood.

"Is there a sickness among the shocking people that drives them out of their senses, to make you come here?"

"I have come for beautiful Christmas," said Harvey, "to make you into a present."

It was an hour past dawn the following morning that Chester

Dumay, Allan's father, came down the river. The Colony's soil expert was traveling with him and their two boats were tied together, proceeding on a single motor. As they came around the bend between the two islands, they had been talking about an acid condition in the soil of Chester's fields, where they bordered the river. But the soil expert—his name was Père Hama, a lean little dark man—checked himself suddenly in mid-sentence.

"Just a minute—" he said, gazing off and away past Chester Dumay's shoulder. "Look at that."

Chester looked, and saw something large and dark floating half-away, caught against the snag of a half-drowned tree that rose up from the muddy bottom of the river some thirty feet out from the far shore. He turned the boat-wheel and drove across toward it.

"What the devil—"

They came up close and Chester cut the motor to let the boats drift in upon the object. The current took them down and the nearer hull bumped against a great black expanse of swollen hide, laced with fragile silver threads and gray-scarred all over by what would appear to have been a fiery whip. It rolled idly in the water.

"A water-bull!" said Hama.

"Is that what it is?" queried Chester, fascinated. "I never saw one."

"I did—at Third Landing. This

one's a monster. And *dead!*" There was a note of puzzlement in the soil expert's voice.

Chester poked gingerly at the great carcass and it turned a little. Something like a gray bubble rose to show itself for a second dimly through several feet of murky water, then rolled under out of sight again.

"A Cidorian," said Chester. He whistled. "All crushed. But who'd have thought one of them could take on one of these!" He stared at the water-bull body.

Hama shuddered a little, in spite of the fact that the sun was bright.

"And win—that's the thing," the soil expert said. "Nobody ever suspected—" He broke off suddenly. "What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, we've got one in our inlet that my son plays with a lot—call him Harvey," said Chester. "I was just wondering . . ."

"I wouldn't let my kid near something that could kill a water-bull," said Hama.

"Oh, Harvey's all right," said Chester. "Still . . ." Frowning, he picked up the boathook and shoved off from the carcass, turning about to start up the motor again. The hum of its vibration picked up in their ears as they headed downriver once more. "All the same, I think there's no point in mentioning this to the wife and boy—no point in spoil-

ing their Christmas. And later on, when I get a chance to get rid of Harvey quietly . . ."

"Sure," said Hama. "I won't say a word. No point in it."

They purred away down the river.

Behind them, the water-bull carcass, disturbed, slid free of the waterlogged tree and began to

drift downriver. The current swung it and rolled, slowly, over and over until the crushed central body of the dead Cidorian rose into the clean air. And the yellow rays of the clear sunlight gleamed from the glazed pottery countenance of a small toy astro-gator, all wrapped about with silver threads, and gilded it.

Through Time and Space With Ferdinand Feghoot

In 2844, Ferdinand Feghoot invented and marketed Dr. Feghoot's Golden Medical Discovery, which raised all vertebrates to the intelligence level of the average TV viewer. This caused an unemployment problem of major proportions. Eventually, though, the new citizens went to work in factories or offices, hired out as domestics, or were blanketed into the civil service. Only the ducks could find no jobs at all.

They appealed to Ferdinand Feghoot himself, who solved the problem at once. It was the custom for people to send themselves greetings on important occasions. After that, when nightingales, thrushes, and other Western Union employees went out to sing greetings like these, a duck went along with the bill.

It was only fitting that Ferdinand Feghoot should get the first of them all on his two hundred and twelfth birthday. The lark messenger sang, "Many happy returns of the day, dear Ferdinand Feghoot," several times; and then the duck extended his beak with the bill.

"Ah!" Ferdinand Feghoot said with a smile. "A duck-billed platitude!"

GRENDAL BRIARTON

When Ron Goulart was a Bright Young Man in journalism at the University of California and later in advertising in San Francisco, professors and account executives alike were unanimous in describing him as a wild talent—so wild that he might well go forth to discover new lands of creativity or equally well wind up, like some outcast manufacturer, inscribed in the book of the damned. Now a full-time writer, Goulart appears certain to fulfill these prophecies with his Fortean researches, which rival those of Eric Frank Russell, Tiffany Thayer or even R. DeWitt Miller.

A New Lo!

by RON GOULART

I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR CHARLES Fort to become topical again. See, I have quite a collection of clippings about odd happenings that I've been thinking of getting up into a book.

It's sort of singular how I came across most of these items. Some little boy came to the door saying he was working his way through Miskatonic and would I like to subscribe to a newspaper. From the moment I agreed, somebody has left a little bundle of clippings on my porch each morning. If I were trying to make this a real research piece I suppose some morning I should get up early enough to get a look at the delivery boy.

Anyway, as a feeler, a trial bal-

loon, this little essay is intended to share some of my oddities with you. Then maybe enough acclaim will work up to warrant a whole book. I have an awful lot of these clippings.

In Budapest in 1874 a stableboy named Oscar Dunkel walked under a horse and was never seen again. Yet today the New York phone directory lists fourteen people named Oscar Dunkel. Teleportation? Or multiplication?

Or does Oscar Dunkel have fourteen telephones? Who does he talk to? He is 143 years old.

In Scarsdale, New York, a necktie salesman explodes in the four-

teenth row of a motion picture theater. A small California town is shocked when a prominent dentist floats away during a wind-storm.

And four years later three small boys in Vermont turn into one tall man during a Kiwanis picnic.

Your scholar will not give an answer, nor an explanation. Vague shakings of the head, mumblings about mass hallucination.

Why then did all the people I have just noted have overdue copies of *Helen's Babies* in their possession when these so-called hallucinations affected them?

I add merely that in 1947 Warner Binns, the tall man, vanished shortly after being walked on by a horse in Little Rock.

And why at this very moment is it raining frogs outside my kitchen window?

In 1912 Earl Moonfry, who took subscriptions for *The Century Magazine* and was learning soft shoe dancing from one of Chicago's largest mail order houses, decided to go to Mexico and fight Pancho Villa. Earl Moonfry disappeared and to this day has not been found.

And so the happenings fall in line and two by two they go marching through. Earl Moonfry, who had to have soft shoes especially made for his own purposes, vanishes. In 1925 in Detroit Earl Lombard, an unemployed ven-

triloquist, walked around a horse and was never seen again. Strange. And what if I were to tell you that the horse was named Earl, too? That in 1926 when a delegation of 4-H Club members visited him he vanished?

An explanation? I say somebody was collecting Earls.

Still, in 1936 Georgia Moonfry, who operated her own hemstitching business, was never seen after October 23.

Is somebody collecting Moonfrys?

In early May of 1932, near St. Paul, the St. Paul *Post-Clarion* reports, a man named Oscar Dunkel fell out of a clear, unclouded sky and landed on a horse. This Dunkel spoke nothing but Norwegian. Do passenger ships with strange cargoes traverse unseen beyond our sky? Did someone shout "Man overboard!" that day in 1932 on the deck of a phantom craft?

And why, when Norman Conover, the owner of the horse, walked behind it to check for damages, did he disappear with a popping sort of sound?

Laugh at teleportation, you scientists. I have my clippings.

Poltergeists, as we all know, do not exist. A clipping from the August 14, 1897, issue of the San Rafael *Register-Star* tells of a twelve-year-old girl who had graduated a year ahead of her class be-

cause four schoolhouses had burnt to the ground.

Two boys in Bristol, R. I., are arrested because all the furniture in their paternal grandmother's summer home vanished during a thunderstorm.

The furniture, except for a wind-up Victrola, appeared six weeks later at the graduation exercises of the Bristol Speed Short-Hand School. It was sold to a junk man, who, when he got back on his wagon behind his horse, caught on fire. When they finally put him out three others had caught fire.

A young man named Ambrose

Rheenes rented a canoe at the head waters of the Mississippi in March of 1934. Two months later in Jackson, Tennessee, he caught fire while tap dancing at a social gathering. When his canoe was located it contained three small boys who claimed to be on their way to a Kiwanis picnic in Vermont.

I think there is something messing things up someplace.

Somewhere in New York, over twenty years ago, someone named Benchley wrote a piece very much like this one. In academic groves they scoff at teleportation. How else can you explain this?

Coming Next Month

Our next issue, on the stands around the end of the year, will feature something different in the way of husband-wife collaborations: a special cover by Emsh to illustrate Carol Emshwiller's *Baby*, a moving story of robotic competence *vs.* the driving hungers of youth. Also featured will be Chad Oliver's *Pilgrimage*, which gleefully establishes that even time travel happens on a grander scale in Texas. Rog Phillips will introduce an attractive new kind of alien life; and there'll be stories—all new; no reprints this time—by such F&SF favorites as Poul Anderson, Avram Davidson and Zenna Henderson.

As Alice learned at the Banquet of the Three Queens, it isn't etiquette to cut any one you've been introduced to. It therefore behooves one to be verbally articulate if one happens also to be succulently edible—a lesson which we might well take to heart, since our own flesh has been highly praised by those fortunate enough to have sampled it.

Little Tin God

by JAY WILLIAMS

YES, THAT SHINY TIN ON THE SHELF is the only souvenir I have left of what might have been a great industry. It ended the night I beat Gerard at roop. I'm not sorry, though; not exactly.

We were partners, uneven partners: Gerard had put up two-thirds of the money and I had put up the other third. Besides, I could speak a number of Venusian dialects, and I had been a collecting zoologist.

Gerard knew the canning end.

I don't know whether you remember or not, but some years ago there was a fad for what was called bush-squirrel. It didn't last long, but while it did everyone ate bush-squirrel. It was—what do the kids say nowadays?—*oofiest*; it was a wonderful delicacy, melting and tender, an indescribable flavor, better than partridge, better than Strasbourg goose-liver, satisfying but not filling. Every gourmet on

two planets wanted it, and a lot of people who weren't gourmets. Well, that was us, that was our industry.

You couldn't freeze the beasts. Something about the fat; it became rancid when it was thawed. The only way to preserve them was by canning them immediately. The new Doe-Mueller process made that fairly easy, of course, and the source of power and heat for cooking, sterilization, and sealing the tins was a ten-by-six Farnsby unit, so we decided that our best bet would be to set up the works right in the bush; collect, can, store, and then ship once a month.

The new macalloy Number Ten tins weighed almost nothing, and all in all it worked out cheaper than if we had had to rent space in Center City, or maintain freezers.

Then, this one evening, after about six months of fairly profitable operation, I won Gerard's jacket at barter-roop. In case you don't

know it, it's just the regular game of roop, only instead of playing for counters you play for belongings.

I didn't much like playing with Gerard, he was an offensive winner and a poor loser, but there wasn't much else he wanted to do. Three or four evenings a week he'd pester me: "Come on, how about a couple of hands of roop?" And when Gerard pestered you it was like being nudged by an elephant.

He was a big, tall, red-faced man, red-haired, freckled, with a wide smile that had something professional about it, one of those genial men who are always slapping you on the back, always saying things like, "I'm thankful for small mercies—and you're small enough," or, "Could be worse, but not much worse."

He had started life as a gospel shouter, I was told, and after a particularly successful season had gone into commercial three-vee. Then he went into the preserved-fruit business, and from that got into dehydrated foods and cereals, and there had been a scrap with the government over adulterated goods, and after a while he had taken his stake and gone to Venus.

"There are always specialities in a new place that somebody wants, if you can just make them see that they want them," he said. "People overlook the obvious. It's like centuries ago when the West was opened; everybody thought of

gold, but the real wealth was right there in the sage brush—it became cattle-grazing land. Today, everybody thinks of Venus as a rare-earth mine, but there are plenty of other things that can be gathered up with a lot less effort."

He was right, too, as a lot of crooks are right, or he would have been, I guess, if it had worked out.

Anyway, night after night we'd sit around and drink gin and play roop, and listen to the singing of the hairy lizards, and the thousand different noises of the night. Usually, he won. But on this particular night I hit a streak of luck. I took the third pot, which had pushed up into a big one, and I got six handkerchiefs, a pair of socks, a bandolier of Jag-gum, and a pocket water-tester.

We started the next pot, and the bidding went up and up, and I felt lucky. I drew two hearts to a supreme of diamonds, and I bid my silk shirt which I knew Gerard coveted. It was real synthetic silk, not this imitation stuff that wears out in no time. He was sweating, and he kept eying me as if he could see through my cards, and finally he put up his Troutman jacket.

I don't know if he had really gone to Troutman College but he sure liked that jacket. It was what they call milk-suede, either because it was made from a casein derivative, or because it was as soft as milk: it was buttercup yellow,

with the little red T over the pocket, and it was warm and light and comfortable.

He said, "What've you got that'll match that?" I said I didn't know. He said, "Will you put up Betsy's picture?"

I didn't know whether he was needling me or was serious. He said, "I mean it," and I could see then that he wasn't kidding. That was the first I knew that he wanted her too. I got mad. I said, "That's a hell of a thing to ask," and he said, "Afraid you'll lose it?"

"No," I said. "I'll put it up."

"That's fine," he said, "just fine. It'll be practice for you."

I said, "What do you mean?" and he said, "For when I take her away from you."

He put down his hand. He had three hearts to a run of clubs. I put down my two hearts and he reached out for the pot, and then I slapped down my supreme of diamonds.

He tried to cover up with a laugh, but it was hollow. He ripped off the jacket and threw it on the table, among the cards. He said, "I'll get it tomorrow night."

"There isn't going to be any tomorrow night," I said.

"Oh?"

"That's right. I'm sick and tired of this game."

"One of those hoggish winners, eh?"

"If that's what you want to call it."

"We'll see."

"All right," I said. I got up and put on the jacket.

"It's too big for you," Gerard said mockingly.

I went outside and slammed the door.

I was boiling with suppressed anger. Winning from Gerard was no pleasure, if you know what I mean, he made it look as though he had let you win and knew very well that he'd get his own back. He wouldn't let me get away with it, I knew that. No matter what I said, we'd play again, maybe next week or the week after, and sooner or later he'd win.

It wasn't only that. He was overbearing and cruel, and I'd had enough of him. I think he really got a certain kick out of something like butchering the squirrels for canning. And he had a way of getting whatever he wanted, so that I knew if he put his mind to it, and wasn't just tormenting me because he was bored, he would really take Betsy away from me.

I took a deep breath of the heavy, scented air. Then I became aware of the fact that the singing of the lizards had stopped. The night, in fact, was silent. That was odd. But it wasn't as odd as what followed.

A small, chirping voice said in the Paa-raka dialect, "The light, the light! Great is the light."

My skin froze.

There was a chorus of cheepings and chitterings, like laughter, or like a roomful of mice. The same voice said, "We greet you."

My teeth began chattering. There was something absolutely terrifying in that tiny voice coming out of the silent darkness. I fumbled at my belt for my lamp, and with a sweating hand I unclipped it and flashed it on.

At first, I saw nothing in the dazzle. Then I became aware of innumerable round, glittering yellow balls that seemed to festoon the trees and creepers like fairy lanterns. As I became accustomed to the light, I saw that they were the eyes and faces of bush-squirrels.

You know, they aren't really squirrels. They're about that size and have bushy short tails, but there the resemblance ends. Nobody who ever saw one would want to eat it; of course, by the time we got through with them, they were just tinned meat. They had large eyes like lemurs, and a kind of folded, leafy structure below that was both nose and mouth. They had rather naked skins, varying in color so that it was difficult to describe the species: some were creamy white, some blue, some red-and-blue, some spotted, but otherwise they looked pretty much alike.

They had leathery wings and spent most of their time in the trees; nevertheless they were easy

enough to catch. The day blinded them, I thought, so that they flew right into our nets. They had disproportionately long teeth and could have given nasty bites, but they always seemed very docile and gentle when we took them.

I realized slowly that it was one of them that was talking to me. For a moment I thought I had gone mad.

The voice, which I saw came from one of the white ones, said slowly, "What is wrong? Are you ill?"

I found myself saying, in a kind of idiot baby-talk, "I am all right. I am surprised. That's all."

"Surprised? Why?" said the squirrel.

"Well," I said, giggling, "it's strange to hear animals talking."

"Animals? I don't understand," said the squirrel. "We are the Sjetjik."

"Good for you," I said. I think then I must have blacked out for a minute. When I came to, I was sitting on the ground and all about me in the light of the lamp were squirrels—or Sjetjiks—hundreds and hundreds of them, and more eyes shining beyond.

The leader—or at any rate, the white one—must have been talking while I was out. "... Far and far away," he was saying, "to learn your speech so that we could speak to you. And now I say, *Welcome*, and, *Good air to you*."

The Paa-raka dialect was not

meant for complicated ideas. By "good air" I suppose he meant something like "good night" or "happy flying." I shook my head.

"Good air to *you*," I said. Then I took hold of myself. I saw that it was simply a matter of making an adjustment, like knowing that a specimen is a mammal and then discovering that it is oviparous as well. The thing was that because they *looked* like small animals we had always taken it for granted they were nothing but small animals. On the other hand, simply because they could speak, or one of them could speak, it didn't mean they were rational creatures, any more than because a gorilla can use simple tools it means he is a man.

The white one flipped his wings and flew down to land beside me. "Now that I can speak your speech," he said, "we can perform the rites."

This did not seem to make much sense. I said slowly, trying to sort out my ideas, "It is not my speech, although I can speak it."

"Ah," he said, "just as I can speak it, although the Sjetjik speak to each other without these words. But we could never make you understand us. That is why I had to go to listen to the Paa-raka."

I thought suddenly that it was quite a feat for this creature to learn a new language in the six months we had been there.

"Tell me who you are," I said.

Although his twittering voice held no human emotion, there was a kind of puzzlement in his tone as he answered, "Who we are? We are the Sjetjik. Or in this speech, one would say the Living Ones."

There was no word for "people" or "men" in the Paa-raka tongue.

"And who am I?" I said.

"You are God," he replied calmly.

I could think of nothing to say but, "Oh." Then, when I had recovered a bit, I said, "How do you know I am?"

He replied promptly. "Because you wear gold." And with one of his front limbs, which looked like nothing so much as a bunch of fish-hooks, he carefully touched Gerard's jacket that I was wearing.

I thought it over. "Do you mean," I asked, "that you can tell by color?"

"How else?" He turned his head and began chirping to the others. Three or four of them came forward well into the light. He motioned to them. "All Living Ones are known by their colors," he said. "The red is the gatherer of songs, the blue is the fruit-picker, the red-and-blue is the shelter-builder. I," he added, with what might have been pride, "am the teller of all that happens."

A historian, I thought to myself; or a newspaperman? I felt positively light-headed. "And gold," he went on, "is the sacred color, the color of God. So we knew you

at once. Did you not know this?"

"No," I said foolishly. "Among us it is not so."

There was a pause. Then I thought of something. "You mean Gerard," I said. "It is his jacket."

"Jacket?" the white one said. "Gerard?"

"The other one of us."

"Ah, the white one."

It occurred to me, then, that he could not tell us apart, for it was I who usually wore a white bush-coat. And certainly, how should he? For, apart from his color, I could not see any essential difference between him and all the hundreds of others of his kind.

"He is the one who speaks for God no doubt," the white one said complacently. "Now, oh Light, oh great Golden Sky, tell us if we may perform the rites of kingship with you as we always have among ourselves?"

I went back into the central hut, where Gerard was laying out a game of solitaire and still drinking gin, which had no appreciable effect on him. I leaned back against the door; everything looked so normal and familiar that for a moment I wondered if I had imagined the whole thing.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" Gerard said. "Want to give me a chance to get even, after all?"

"Listen, Gerard," I said, "this is serious. I have just been talking to a bush-squirrel."

He leaned back in his chair as I had known he would, and put his chin on his freckled hands. Before he could say anything, I went on quickly, "It's real. Listen to me, for heaven's sake. I'm not crazy, and I'm not drunk, and I'm not kidding. *They can talk.*"

He looked at me for a long time. Then he said, "All right. They can talk."

"They can talk. One of them, a kind of expert, went off to the nearest Paa-raka settlement and learnt the language so they could talk to us."

"That's more than I could ever do, with those triple consonants," Gerard said jocularly. Then he looked at me again. "You're really serious about this, aren't you?"

"They think we're some kind of god," I blurted out.

"You mean they can really talk? Not just parrot words?"

"That's it. They're rational, intelligent creatures."

He chewed his lip for a moment. "If they're so intelligent, how come they let us catch them for the pot?"

"That's just it. They think we're gods and that we are sending them to a better land. They see the light behind the clouds, during the day, and they have a belief that up there is a bright land where it is always day. That's why it's been so easy to catch them; that's why none of us has ever been bitten by them."

"I see." He thought about it for a while. Then he said, "Well, what about it?"

"What about—? Why, they're people, Gerard. Don't you see?" I almost shouted.

"Calm down," he said. "Don't get so worked up. As far as I can see, it just makes our job that much easier. Doesn't it? So they talk. Could we make a better profit by exhibiting them to a roomful of scientists somewhere? Or do you think there's still a future in hitting the carnival circuit with talking animals? We're better off with this business. Our first six months have paid off our initial investment and given us a profit already. The demand is growing; we're going to start booming soon. Bush-squirrel for Christmas instead of turkey or goose. Eh? And if they want to jump into our Doe-Muellers and save us the trouble of netting them, why's that so bad?"

I stared at him. "Gerard," I said, trying to keep my voice level, "these are reasoning creatures."

"Have they got souls?"

"They believe in God."

"In me, you mean," he cried. "Don't make me laugh, Oren. It says right in the Bible, *God created man in his own image*. He didn't create him in the image of a bush-squirrel. Use your head. What makes them human? Do they look human? Do they get married, or go to church? Do they crack jokes, or drink gin?"

"But they're intelligent," I said.

He pushed away the table and got up. He was grinning, but it was an uncheerful thing to see. "You're a sentimentalist, Oren," he said. "A bloody sentimentalist. How do you know they're intelligent?"

"Listen," I said desperately. "There are millions of people on Earth and on Venus, too, who don't get married the way we do, or go to church, or drink gin, or even look like us or tell jokes like ours. Lord knows what kind of jokes the Sjetjik tell, or whether they ever laugh. But they are just as human inside themselves as we are.

"They have enough brains to learn a new language quickly. They have enough sense of poetry to connect the color yellow with the sunlight beyond the clouds of Venus. They have enough intelligence to make myths in which their god-king is golden like the light—that's why they think we're gods, because of this yellow jacket of yours. And they're waiting outside now, no different from any other worshipers, to worship us."

"They are, eh?" His red face became very hard. "And what do you want to do?"

"We've got to tell them," I said earnestly, "that we're just men. We've got to pack up and go, and leave them alone. Could you ever . . . eat one of them again, put one through the Doe-Muellers, know-

ing that it was a rational being?"

"Sure," he said. He had come closer to me, and all at once his pistol was in his hand, the muzzle only a couple of inches from my stomach. He looked at me coldly and impersonally, and I realized that this man would have put me through the choppers if he could have made a buck out of it—yes, and eaten me, too.

"You're a sentimental fool, Oren," he said. "That's why you won't get far. You don't deserve a girl like Betsy. You don't deserve even your one-third of the profits. But I'm an easy-going guy. I'm not going to kill you. I'll tell you what I am going to do, though. Give me that jacket."

I took it off.

"Now turn round." When I turned, he slipped the jacket on and held the gun against my back.

"All right," he said. "Let's go outside."

"What for?" I asked.

"I can understand that Paa-raka talk, but I can't speak it. You'll go out with me and tell them what

the deity says." He chuckled. "He says he is very pleased with them, and they are to get on with their worship, and tomorrow—Are there lots of them, by the way?"

"There are thousands," I said sullenly.

"Good. Tomorrow, the first five hundred can report to my altar. The Doe-Muellers. That's about capacity, I should say. Get going."

So we went outside.

By now, the Sjetjik are accepted as one of the aboriginal tribes of Venus, less human-looking of course, than the Paa-raka, but not as curious by any means as the recently discovered Hlouma in the northern islands. They do learn fast—just as quickly as they learnt to operate our Doe-Muellers—but they keep their ancient rites, including that of tearing their god-king to pieces every half-year and sending him to his Happy Land of Light above the clouds.

And that's why I keep the tin. I'm not sure it's Gerard but, just as he said, I'm a sentimentalist.

Help Fight TB



Buy Christmas Seals

December is the simmering season in collegiate football. There are a handful of late regular games and early bowl games to be played; but the fan's major attention is focused on the past, as the experts who have been forcibly revising their guesses every week now reach their final conclusions as to the rank of the nation's best teams, and on the future—January 1, the reddest-letter day in the football filbert's calendar, when the major bowl games will cause the experts to re-revise their final revised ratings. While you rest from your efforts to find some sucker who'll back the PCC against the Big Ten in the Rose Bowl, Les Cole and Mel Sturgis bring you a sequel to Conversion Factor (F&SF, November, 1957), in which California quarterback Cameron brings off, as the title indicates, a football feat unmatched in the annals of two planets.

The 24,000-Mile Field Goal

by COLIN STURGIS

CAMERON CERTAINLY HADN'T REALIZED that a term paper for Physics 199 would result in an unprecedented delay in the classic Heidelberg-California football game. Nor did he have the slightest inkling that his last-ditch attempt at a game-winning 24-yard field goal would not only result in hurried and red-faced changes in the rule books of two planets, but also modify the time-honored bromide of "what goes up must come down."

That is, he hadn't realized any of these events until now. However,

he had had 3 days, 23 hours, and 40 minutes for the realization to reach an evaluation level. Cameron had painfully booted the ball at precisely 4:01 P.M. Saturday, November 29. It was now 3:21 P.M. Wednesday, December 3. Even a diehard fanatic will stipulate this is an abnormal duration for the completion of one play.

At the present, Cameron was ready to stipulate anything. As he sat with his team mates in the locker room, under the capacity-crowded, 115,000-seat Pappy Waldorf Memorial Stadium, he wasn't

overly enthused that ENIAC—after due consideration of certain pertinent data—had promised the football would return exactly twelve minutes hence:

Cameron was concerned with a more personal problem. If his four-day-old field goal was good: he would lose his girl friend. If the kick was bad: he would lose his girl friend. Worse, she had traveled all the way from Mars, and consequently would be a direct witness to his dilemma. And all because of a term paper in physics, in which he hadn't expected to earn a passing grade in the first place.

At first glance, De Morgan's Law of the Excluded Middle would seem to insist that a physics term paper and an attempted field goal are mutually exclusive events. However, De Morgan had failed to reckon with "Brain" Modjewski, the Golden Bear right guard and Cameron's roommate. Modjewski was attending Cal on a math scholarship; and this, being strange, made him not as socially acceptable as those members of the team who were butting heads for a physical ed degree.

However, Cameron had a soft spot for the guard, who had discovered a method of defeating Hanford University of Mars in the Solar Bowl the previous year; the first time an Earth team had turned the trick in fifteen attempts. Because of this victory, Cameron had been able to woo Peggy Jen-

kins, with whom he had subsequently enjoyed a 48-million-mile courtship. It was generally conceded by all concerned—except Peggy's father—that they would be married as soon as Cameron graduated. The overdue term paper in Physics 199, however, seemed grimly determined to keep him from reaching this happy status.

This threatened interference to his love life made Cameron restless; therefore, he didn't sleep. Brain—who was fond of lying in bed and calculating the fluctuations in the world birth rate by integrating over several random samples—seldom slept. Thus, the stage was set for a world-record-breaking attempt at a field goal some five days later.

At the time, however, Cameron wasn't thinking about football, except in an abstract manner. He had had to take Physics 199 because of the stringent Cal scholastic standards. For Cameron, the course was a grinder—although he had picked a relatively easy term project. Brain sensed the quarterback's restlessness.

"Aw, Cameron, what's the matter?" Modjewski inquired from the darkness.

"It's this damn term paper for Professor Bounce," Cameron said irritably. "I don't think he will accept my lab project."

"That's a stinker of a course, all right," agreed Brain, who had taken Physics 199 his freshman

year. "But maybe I can help you."

"I don't know," Cameron pondered. "I've built an inertial guidance system the size of a cigarette, but now I'm worried that miniaturization of components alone is too weak a project to earn a passing grade. Bounce likes original concepts."

Modjewski sat up in bed and switched on the desk light. "What's an inertial guidance?"

"That's just it," Cameron admitted sheepishly. "No one has even heard of it for 90 years. It was developed back in the '50's as a guidance device for missiles. With the inertialess spaceship drive, it wasn't needed in navigation any more."

"Gee, Cameron," Modjewski said eagerly. "How does it work?"

Cameron produced a tiny cylindrical object from the desk and handed it to Brain. "A century ago," Cameron explained, "a system like this was used to guide a missile from one point on the Earth's surface to any other point by dead reckoning—without any reference whatsoever to anything outside the missile itself. It isn't too complicated. The heart of the device is an extremely sensitive and stable accelerometer. Course deviation resulted in acceleration; a computer feedback corrected the controls. I requisitioned all the micro-components from the store-room: accelerometers with double integrators, gyro-stabilized plat-

form, and the ion clock. The only thing I couldn't get was a computer; the smallest one we have is still as big as a cigarette package. Of course," he reflected, "that doesn't make any difference. Doesn't make any difference how far the computer is separated from the accelerometer; radio transmission is instantaneous, and I'm going to demonstrate it only in the lab."

Modjewski frowned. "What's the ion clock for?"

"To correct for the Earth's rotation."

Brain was sympathetic. "Gee, Cameron. I know old Bounce don't go for historical curiosities, but you sure did a pretty job on it. I haven't any ideas right now, but you don't have to turn this in for a couple of weeks. Lemme at it; maybe I'll think of something."

Cameron surrendered the cylinder and found the psychological shifting of the burden extremely conducive to sleep. He dropped off promptly and began to dream of a cute redhead with chinaberry eyes and a porcelain smile. However, a stern-faced man, easily recognizable as Peggy's father, kept interfering by showering Peggy with oversized thousand-dollar bills, and waving a college flag which alternately read Hanford University and Heidelberg U. Had Cameron been awake, he could have interpreted the dream: "Spec" Jenkins had bet

heavily on Heidelberg defeating California in next Saturday's grand finale for both teams.

Keith Jenkins had earned the nickname "Spec" because, it was rumored, he'd made his millions speculating in Martian real estate. This wasn't quite true. Jenkins didn't know anything about Martian real estate—he had speculated in underground water reservoirs; speculated openly in public earshot. But it was true that he had uncounted millions, was one of the Martian nouveau riche, and was a snob.

All Martians were snobs. But the absolute worst of the lot were Hanford students and alumni. Jenkins was on the Hanford board of trustees, and its largest endower, by far. Peggy's father had not forgiven Cameron as the man who made the Golden Bear upset over Hanford possible in the Solar Bowl; in fact, Keith Jenkins had been the prime mover in pressuring the IBC—Interplanet Bowl Commission—to pass a hurried rule that prevented any Earth team from playing in the Solar Bowl two years in succession.

Because Heidelberg and California were the only two major Earth teams still undefeated, and because of the nonsuccession rule, Heidelberg had already been invited to the Solar Bowl. Disgusted California alumni were screaming "second-best" for pub-

lication in the newspapers, and various unprintable terms for their own comfort at beach parties.

Even the Martian newspapers had to admit that if Cal were to beat the Heidelberg eleven on the coming Saturday, it would be the same as if the Bears were giving the Hanford Indians another drubbing. Little wonder, then, that Spec Jenkins didn't care *who* beat the Bears—just as long as it was Heidelberg.

By game time, tension had built up until both Heidelberg and California were as taut as violin strings. Cal was not lulled into a false sense of security by the second-best cries. Heidelberg was plenty tough.

The only common opponent for the teams had been UCLA. Heidelberg had beaten UCLA by two touchdowns; the Bears had the misfortune to tangle with the Bruins at Los Angeles, and were very lucky to escape disaster by the margin of a Cameron field goal.

Earlier in the morning, Cameron had seen in the papers that Spec and his beautiful daughter Margaret were staying at the St. Francis, in San Francisco. Because the Bears were in pre-game isolation, it had been impossible for Cameron to contact Peggy. However, he had been allowed to phone her—only to be told by a haughty retainer that Miss Jenkins was attending a luncheon with the

Hanford quarterback. Evidently the back was a guest of Jenkins because even Hanford scholarships couldn't allow for Mars-Earth passage. This news made Cameron even more determined to win.

He had quite forgotten his inertial guidance term paper.

The favored Heidelberg team was even tougher than its press notices. Not only that, but they had a domineering attitude that made the sweating Bears overeager in their own play. Consequently, midway in the second quarter, the Bears were trailing 21-0, and Heidelberg had even derisively turned off its huge sideline computer-coach, causing quite a stir on the German, or North, side of the stadium.

Heidelberg, of course, was well known as the center of technical education. The "coach" was an intricate electronic computer. Technician-scouts, during a game, constantly fed punched-tape information into the coach. The coach, with infallible logic, fed a continuous stream of advice to the team via an ingenious closed-circuit radio. As long as manpower was available, the Heidelberg team was limited only by physical endurance. And of this, there was ample reserve.

Cameron called for a time out, and sank wearily on the field. Washington, the Bear left halfback, grabbed for a water bottle.

"That damned automation is killing us," he complained bitterly. "They know our plays better than we do."

"Yeah" chimed in Robinson, the right half. "What are we going to do about it, Cameron?"

"Now hold on, guys," Cameron said. "Heidelberg may be geared to anticipate our plays a little better than we can theirs, but they're still only eleven men. They've just got us on the run. Because they know where we're going doesn't mean they can stop us. We ought to run right over them. They're out-blocking and out-tackling us."

"Speaking of which, Brain," he continued. "The last two plays, you've let their left guard slip through and clobber me good. What the hell do you think I'm made of, India rubber?"

"Aw, gee, Cameron," Modjewski apologized. "I'm sorry. I was calculating their defense by extrapolating our offense. I been doing it all this quarter; I can tell what every man on their team is going to do, as long as they got that computer working."

"What are you talking about, Brain?" Jensen, the big Bear fullback demanded. "Are you trying to say you can out-think that computer?"

"Aw, gee," Modjewski answered modestly. "It's just a machine."

"Wait a minute, guys," Cam-

eron interrupted. "Brain's right. All that machine knows is what it is fed. We've convinced ourselves those guys are supermen. Hell, let's tell them where we're going—then run right up their jerseys! Go!"

The team, caught in Cameron's sudden burst of enthusiasm, yelled as they formed their huddle. The referee blew his whistle, time was in, and the Bears snapped to the line of scrimmage.

Cameron lined them up in a T, then shifted into a single wing left. He took the pass from center and followed Washington and Jensen around the strong side. The Heidelberg left end was waiting for the play, but Cameron stiff-armed him out of the way. The line tackled him, but he battled for four more yards before they could bring him down.

The play had picked up six yards. It was second and four on the Bear 40. Cameron again lined them up in single wing left. Jensen took the ball on a fullback spin, hit the center of the line for seven. The Cal rooters came to life as they sensed that the team was beginning to move.

The left end, Parker, took a perfect buttonhook pass from Cameron, and went for 10. Heidelberg asked for a time out, but it didn't interrupt the Bear's drive. Cameron made four over guard, then sent Robinson scooting wide on the tail-end of a single-wing

double reverse. No better method of getting a halfback downfield has ever been devised—aside from motorcycles—than a single-wing double reverse, when it's working. The Heidelberg team watched the play develop, but was steam-rolled by a phalanx of blue-and-gold jerseys. Robinson waltzed over the goal line, escorted by Modjewski and Jensen, both of whom would have blocked out the goal posts if Robinson had swerved in that direction.

The Cal rooters, in a rash of understandable undergraduate enthusiasm, rolled three freshmen—dressed in Heidelberg colors for the occasion—from the top tier of the stadium to the bottom. When Cameron kicked the extra point, two innocent bystanders were also rolled.

Although the Bears trailed 21-7 when play was resumed for the second half, Heidelberg couldn't put out the fire. It had been decided during the half-time period that speed and deception were right up the electronic-gear'd Heidelberg eleven's alley. The only way the Bears were going to win this game was to slug it out with old-fashioned Sanders-type power plays. It was one thing for a computer to tell you where a play was going—but another thing to stop it.

The Bears had lost the pre-game toss so were allowed their choice to open the second half. They

chose to receive. Cameron accepted the ball on his 20, and was stopped in his tracks by two burly defenders. Using only straight power—tackle slants, fullback spinners, and end runs—the Bears drove the eighty yards in nineteen plays. But it was a mighty tired team of Golden Bears that watched Cameron make good his second conversion.

Heidelberg—with Modjewski calling defensive signals against the computer-coach—was unable to move the ball and forced to punt. Cameron failed to revive the exhausted Bears and wisely kicked on third down.

Again Heidelberg failed to make a first down, and after a punt and a time out, the Bears had the ball on their own 25. Cameron picked up ten on a beautiful slice between tackle and end, and the Bears began to show a little more snap. Parker ran for fifteen off an optional pass-and-run as the quarter ended.

On the first play of the fourth quarter, the option was good enough for ten more yards, as Cameron churned around left end. The Cal stands were taking up the chant, and the Bears were running from the huddle. Jensen picked up six on a spinner, and Washington added six more on a fake double reverse. Everyone in the stadium was on his feet, and twice Cameron had to stop play because the signals could not be

heard. The underdog Bears were on the march.

From a short punt formation, Jensen bulled his way to the Heidelberg 17. The German team pulled in the single safety, and went into a seven-diamond defense. The Bears were still fired up, but the next three plays netted a loss of four yards. However, there was still time on the scoreboard clock. Cameron called for a field goal, calmly split the up-rights from the 36.

The Bear quarter didn't know he'd made the kick, though he should have realized from that distance it was automatic. But he lay stretched out, submarined by the opposing left guard, well after the ball was in the air. The guard, a true Neanderthal with a Heidelberg jaw, grinned viciously after completing the dirty work of twisting Cameron's ankle.

The California rooting section chanted, "Get that ball!" However, the Heidelberg eleven, confident and employing the psychology for which the school was so justly famed, gave the Bears some of their own medicine. Taking the kickoff, the Solar Bowl shoo-ins put together a series—four- and five-yard chunks—that ate up the clock and carried to the California six-yard stripe. There the Bears stiffened, took the ball on downs. But Heidelberg had accomplished the purpose: the stadium clock showed one minute fifty-five sec-

onds of playing time left, and the German team - led, 21-17. Could the Bears make it?

Cameron's ankle was hurting, and he had to grit his teeth to keep from limping. He called a fake fullback spin, then straightened and looked for his pass receivers. The play caught the Heidelberg defense momentarily by surprise—all that was needed. Cameron hit the right end, White, with a perfectly thrown 35-yard pass. White should have gone all the way, but he had only one fault as an end: he was too slow. Two Heidelberg players caught him at the 7, with a slashing tackle. And then came the heart stopper. The ball squirted from White's grasp, and a Heidelberg player promptly fell on it.

That should have been the game. Fans were beginning to move toward the exit escalators. The clock showed less than one minute fifteen seconds remaining. Heidelberg could easily run out the time.

But the heartsick Bears had other ideas. Two tries at the line gained nothing and used up fifty seconds, but the Bears' hard-charging defense forced a referee's time out to replace three Heidelberg players. The computer-coach wisely sent in a game-winning play. The quarterback retreated into his end zone and waited for the onrushing Bears to down him.

The scoreboard immediately

posted a safety for California, but the eleven still trailed by two very big points—and Heidelberg had a free kick from their 20. With only twenty seconds remaining, Cal's cause was all but hopeless.

Heidelberg chose a punt. The ball was high and gave the defenders plenty of time to get downfield. But the Heidelberg kicker had made a near-fatal error. He punted into the waiting hands of Robinson.

Robinson desperately back-pedaled out of reach of the first tackler, and then no one else had a chance; the speedy back cut across the field and tight-roped up the sidelines. Ordinarily, Robinson would have made it to the goal line, pulling away. But he was tired and Heidelberg safety was fresh. He caught Robinson on the 12, and a groan of anguish rose from the Cal side of the field.

The Bears, immediately calling time with fourteen seconds to play, trotted up the field, followed by Cameron, noticeably favoring his injured ankle. In the huddle Cameron said, "There's time for a field goal, if we can get it into position."

"Give me the ball," begged Washington. "I'll lay it between the goal posts."

Cameron grinned, called Washington's number. As he passed off the ball, he was tumbled roughly to the turf, and once again his right leg was twisted. He stopped a cry of pain; then blackness de-

scended as he heard the whistle blow.

When he came to, the team was huddled around him. "Are you all right, Cameron?" Modjewski was anxiously watching him, from a height that seemed fantastic.

"Where's the ball?" Cameron asked.

Washington's dirt-streaked face appeared. "On the five-yard line," he grinned. "Smack in front of the goal posts."

"Can you do it, Cameron?" Modjewski begged. "There's still six seconds left." He helped Cameron to his feet.

Sharp pains shot through the ankle. He could at least stand, but could he kick? He limped a couple of steps.

"Aw, gee, Cameron," Modjewski said. "I saw that tackle. He was deliberately trying to twist your leg."

"I have to kick," Cameron said groggily.

"Listen, Cameron," Modjewski said suddenly. "Don't let them call time in for a second. I'm going after the kicking tee." He ran to the sidelines, conferred briefly, ran back. Cameron limped into the huddle.

"Cameron, lemme hold the ball for you," Modjewski asked. "And don't try to kick for distance; just kick for accuracy. It's a cinch."

Cameron smiled wanly, patted an OK on Modjewski's helmet. And then the mists cleared; as the

line set. "We're on the fourteen," Cameron said. "I'll have to kick twenty-four yards to make the crossbar. With this ankle, I couldn't kick twenty-four inches—"

Modjewski said, "Aw, remember, accuracy, not distance." Then the ball was snapped into his hands; he slapped it hard, put it in position. It was sheer instinct, despite the pain, that made Cameron kick. Desperate fingers of defensive linemen came hurtling at him. Just as the final gun sounded, Modjewski rose to protect his friend.

It was unnecessary. The linemen stopped their rush, stood staring upwards, mouths open. Cameron, too. The entire Bear and Heidelberg aggregations. In fact, every person in the huge stadium watched with a fascination bordering on the morbid.

There was no sound as the ball slowly rose and rose . . . and rose. True, it drifted in seemingly perfect position toward the goal posts, but it was also gaining incredible height for the force of the kick. Within moments, it was out of sight; if the kick *had* been successful, no one was capable of saying so. A muted buzz began in the stadium. Cameron, on Mars, had made the longest place kick on record. Now, it seemed, he'd made the highest. Was it good?

Then pandemonium broke loose. Heidelberg screamed "foul"

and claimed the victory. California, although not yet aware of what happened, screamed equally hard that whatever went up had to come down. Heidelberg University would damn well have to wait for that ball to descend before claiming the game—if then.

The officials were at a complete loss. They conferred noisily, with much arm waving, but came to no decision. Rule books were brought on the field.

Cameron knew Modjewski. He grabbed the guard by the shoulder pads and hauled him to one side of the milling players.

"Listen, what the hell did you do to that ball?"

"Aw, Cameron," Modjewski hedged, kicking at the turf, "I was only trying to help. You would have made it easy if that louse hadn't twisted your leg."

"Never mind that," Cameron snapped. "Tell me what you did—or you'll eat every blade of grass in the stadium."

"Gee, I was just fiddling with your term project during the week—I tried to tell you all day, but I didn't get the chance. Then when I saw that guy twist your leg, I thought it would help us, so I taped it to the ball."

"Damn it, Brain, make sense," Cameron said. "My inertial guidance system wouldn't have any effect on a football."

"Aw, don't get mad," Modjewski pleaded. "The other night I

got to thinking how I could make your project original enough for old Bounce. With an independent power supply"—he pointed to a small box hooked to his belt—"and a little change in the Einsteinian equations . . . Well, anyway, what I did was hook up your device to a miniature anti-gravity set."

"Oh, no," Cameron groaned. "We'll have to forfeit the game."

"Gee, Cameron, the ball will be back," Modjewski promised worriedly. "All I did," he continued modestly, "was give the ball a little extra boost."

"Little extra boost!" Cameron exploded. "Damn it, Brain, even if this is true, why did you have to let it go so high?"

"Aw, Cameron," said the embarrassed Modjewski. "I didn't have time to fix it good. It has to go up about five miles before I can get the system to work. Then it can only go in a straight line, following the earth's curve. But it'll be back. Your guidance system will bring it right to this spot."

"But Modjewski," Cameron argued. "That guidance system has to have a computer, or it won't work."

"Well," Modjewski said shyly. "I couldn't get one, so I'm going to be the computer." He removed a small radio-sending power pack from his helmet. "I won't have to compute very hard," he added.

Cameron sighed. "I believe you, even if you're crazy. When will the ball be back?"

"Gosh, Cameron, I haven't figured that out yet. But I got a lot of time. It'll be three; four days."

The officials didn't believe Modjewski's explanation. But the ball *had* acted peculiarly, and it *might* be back. Anyway, the game couldn't be ended until the play was finished. And this play certainly wasn't finished. They threw up their hands and departed. The World Football Federation would have to debate this one.

It was impossible to keep the flying football a secret, of course. Before the screaming crowd could leave the stadium—fortified by rain checks, pending developments—reports of an Unidentified Flying Object had come in from San Francisco and the Farallon Islands, just off the coast. New, supersensitive radar on Catalina also picked it up. Less than an hour later, the sports columns of the world were debating the legality of the play—if the football actually was powered by anti-gravity.

Japan readied a 50-inch telescope, and Radio Tokyo confirmed that the UFO was indeed a football; the debating began in earnest. That same night three separate cults were formed in Los Angeles, dedicated to the worship of Flying Footballs.

Over the years, Russo-American relations had improved, a relative

term meaning they hadn't worsened. As soon as it was evident, however, that the ball would pass over territory of the USSR, relations started downward again. Radio Moscow stoutly maintained the game had been a trick of capitalism, covered by athletics.

Newspapers in Southern California claimed the Russians had no business entering into the controversy; they were just mad because they had never been able to field a winning football team. The Russians countered by demanding the Americans withdraw from the World Football Federation before the disputed play could be discussed.

The Californians ignored this request. The Russians next said the ball was a spy-eye, and hinted dark consequences. Washington greeted this announcement with anxiety, but diplomatically and tactfully pointed out that of the 14 space stations circling the globe, five were American. The U.S. was already spying on the Soviet Union to the extent of its abilities.

Sulkily, Russia then announced she would shoot the football down.

Hours later, triumphantly, she announced she had.

So did the People's Government of the Ukraine.

So did the People's Government of Poland.

About that time, some enterprising woman reporter had dug up the stories of Cameron's game-

winning field goal in the Solar Bowl, and his romance with the daughter of a Martian multi-millionaire. This was good enough to add to the world-wide attention: *anything* would have been, at that time.

Out of Paris came the simple statement: "The Flying Football has been detected. L'amour, l'amour . . ."

The Heidelberg computer-coach proved to be more than mere machine. When the technicians had fed it the punched-tape questions from reporters, it had distinctly replied in the hearing of Cameron: "*Verfluchter Dreck!*" This wasn't a phrase Cameron had learned in school, but he could imagine what it meant.

The Heidelberg team then flew home in a rage, claiming they had won.

Modjewski naively gave the general idea of the anti-gravity to the representatives of the world's press eight minutes before U.S. Intelligence agents could enter the stadium and put him under protective custody. The agents spent an unprofitable two hours questioning the guard.

Cameron finally got to see Peggy—the Hanford quarterback, it seemed, had developed a slight case of charley-horse, due to Earth gravity—and true love seemed to be taking a more reasonable course.

Meanwhile, the arguments concerning the as yet unfinished football game had reached international proportions.

The head linesman was interviewed on TV. He was a graduate of New York University on Mars; and was obviously prejudiced. On the program *Face the System*, while being questioned by a panel of reporters, he said, "It's plain, downright, dishonest cheating."

The NYUM man was asked why.

He replied, "Because the ball was given artificial aid in its flight."

Surprisingly, the next night, the referee, from the Hanseatic League, went on the air in California's defense: "There is nothing in the rules at the present time that militates against anti-gravity; after all, the kicking tee itself is an artificial aid. The rule book does not stipulate that a field goal attempt is limited in either distance or elapsed time."

And so the sports world was split into two factions. The World Football Federation, however, calmly reviewed the case strictly according to the rules: Although the august body quickly passed a dictum that no anti-gravity devices would be allowed in the game next season, it carefully refrained from ruling on the present case. In other words, this game had not been finished.

The head linesman, who had

been somewhat snubbed by the television interviewers, promptly pointed out that the game was still in progress; therefore, both teams would have to be on the field when the ball returned, to avoid a forfeit. The ball was now over the Atlantic. The Heidelberg team was rushed back to California, passing the ball on its way.

The Heidelberg coach, upon landing, was eagerly interviewed. Its only answer to the punched-tape questions were "*Verdammt Mist.*" Cameron, who had investigated the previous statement, now was only too sure what this meant.

In the locker room under the stands, the Bear coach gave a simple speech, thanking the boys for the terrific game they had played. Cameron wasn't listening. Peggy had told him that her father was very angry because, after consulting a well-known physicist, he had discovered that the ball, aided by inertial guidance, made it virtually impossible for the Heidelberg team to defend against the field goal. Consequently, whether the kick was good or not, Cameron was certainly in the dog house.

Six minutes before the ball was scheduled to return to the field of play, both teams took the field for calisthenics; four days *had* caused a certain stiffness. Exactly as predicted by ENIAC, the ball appeared over the eastern rim of the stadium. The field had been

quickly cleared, and 22 men clustered at the Heidelberg end of the field. The whistle was blown, signifying that play was begun.

Suddenly, the entire German team lined up along the golden stripe that marked the end-zone. The ball, now low, passed the 40; at that moment, the Heidelberg defensive captain yelled: "*Eins, Zwei, Drei—Aufspringen!*" All eleven men floated upward as a body, and formed a solid wall in front of the goal posts. True to tradition, Heidelberg University had achieved a working model of an anti-gravity device in less than four days!

For a moment, Cameron was stunned. The kick would be blocked! Bitterly, he suspected where the research funds had come from: Keith Jenkins was protecting his investment.

And then, seeing Modjewski—as usual, engineering castles in the air—Cameron realized there was a possible way out. "Brain!" he yelled, "can you control that ball from here?"

"Aw, gee, sure. Soon's the ball comes into range, I can cut off the power."

"OK, then," Cameron shouted. "I need a trajectory that . . ."

Most of the California team heard, but they were the only ones. Their whoops of joy were also unheard because of the shouting and surprise at the new Luftwaffe, the airborne German team.

The defense floated lazily upward, confident now. But the ball, at the 32-yard line, suddenly plummeted earthward in a steep parabolic curve. It was just right: the spheroid slammed against the toes of a careless Heidelberg, and continued downward but deflected in the opposite direction.

"Achtung! Achtung! Freier Ball—Freier Ball!"

The free football settled into the waiting Cameron's arms as though it were Peggy. Slowly, limping, he began to run toward the goal line.

Confusion reigned, and madness. Wildly desperate Heidelberg men began the slow float to earth; unfortunately, the Chair of Physics had neglected to incorporate a cutoff switch, in fear of broken ankles. And Cameron, cursing his limp, was now at the five.

There would be one only who could possibly stop him: the ankle-twisting left guard, who began flapping his arms rapidly. It was a case of panic, his forgetting the carefully taught "action equals reaction."

Out of nowhere came Modjewski, the one time in his college career that he was ready to make the crunching, smashing block that would assure him a place in the California annals of fame, along with Muller, Schwartz, Reinhardt and Richter.

Modjewski wasn't needed: the left guard was now hanging up-

side down, a good four feet up. Cameron trotted over easily—and both he and his mathematical roommate had attained their places.

The referee halted play again, to the wild screams of all around the stadium. It was only a momentary halt; California declined the penalty against Heidelberg for not having 11 men on the field of play. The team laughed with glee when Cameron missed the conversion, his first miss in 33 games. Now it was all over; the Bears had won it, 25-21, with no doubt in anyone's mind about the legality of the last play.

The California team, unable to move because of the swarms of spectators, huddled and gave the traditional cheer for the opponent. Fed the punched tape, the Heidelberg coach hummed, summed, in answer "*Blat!*"

Finally, the police and FBI agents who'd moved in for the ball game were able to restore order. Cameron, following the team to the dressing room, came to a dead stop. Peggy was there, Peggy and her father.

Jenkins stepped forward, took Cameron's hand. "Any man who can cheat legally," he said in a gruff but benign voice, "as you did, is bound to make a good business man. You have my blessings!"

Cameron drew himself up with pride. "But I didn't—"

Peggy covered his mouth with her hand, as the stern father continued, "You'll have to start small and prove yourself. For a wedding present, I'm giving you a small company. It's called"—he drew an envelope from his pocket and consulted the contents—"oh, yes, it's called General Electric. Of course, I trust you'll be hiring Modjewski . . . and his anti-gravity device?"

The guard, who'd been pacing the limping Cameron, and was now standing nearby looked startled. Then his rugged, homely, craggy, likable face split in a grin. "Gee, ya mean it?"

"Certainly," Cameron said, "if you'll answer one question."

"Sure, sure."

"It's about that crazy football."

The special agents, who'd just begun to drift away, stopped and listened with interest.

"Gee, what do you wanta know, Cameron?"

"Why couldn't the Russians shoot the thing down?"

The circle of agents grew much, much tighter.

"Aw, don't be mad, Cameron," Modjewski said apprehensively. "I just didn't want anything to happen to the ball. The same modifications in the equation that permit anti-gravity can also be used in another way. But honest! I was only trying to help, so I built a force-field into the generator."

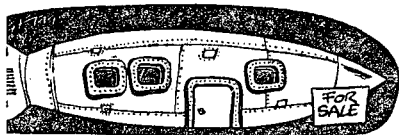
Thus it was that Cameron became a business executive, husband, and father, and Modjewski a national resource.



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Earlier in this issue, Gordon Dickson told of the spread of Christmas customs to an alien race; now Brian Aldiss relates the coming of Christmas to the even more alien world of highly automated and self-sufficient machines. John Carnell, editor of England's New Worlds, calls Aldiss "one of the brightest rising stars we have had in this country for some years"; and Aldiss' first collection of stories, SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), fully confirms the judgment—as does this quirkish episode, at once comic and terrible.

The New Father Christmas

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

LITTLE OLD ROBERTA TOOK THE clock down off the shelf and put it on the hotpoint; then she picked up the kettle and tried to wind it. The clock was almost on the boil before she realised what she had done. Shrieking quietly, so as not to wake old Robin, she snatched up the clock with a duster and dropped it onto the table. It ticked furiously. She looked at it.

Although Roberta wound the clock every morning when she got up, she had neglected to look at it for months. Now she looked and saw it was 7:30 on Christmas Day, 2388.

"Oh dear," she exclaimed. "It's Christmas Day already! It seems

to have come very soon after Lent this year."

She had not even realised it was 2388. She and Robin had lived in the factory so long. The idea of Christmas excited her, for she liked surprises—but it also frightened her, because she thought about the New Father Christmas and that was something she preferred not to think about. The New Father Christmas was reputed to make his rounds on Christmas morning.

"I must tell Robin," she said. But poor Robin had been very touchy lately; it was conceivable that having Christmas suddenly forced upon him would make him

cross. Roberta was unable to keep anything to herself, so she would have to go down and tell the tramps. Apart from Robin, there were only the tramps.

Putting the kettle onto the stove, she left her living quarters and went into the factory, like a little mouse emerging from its mince-pie-smelling nest. Roberta and Robin lived right at the top of the factory and the tramps had their illegal home right at the bottom. Roberta began tiptoeing down many, many steel stairs.

The factory was full of the sort of sounds Robin called "silent noise." It continued day and night, and the two humans had long ago ceased to hear it; it would continue when they had become incapable of hearing anything. This morning, the machines were as busy as ever, and looked not at all Christmassy. Roberta noticed in particular the two machines she hated most: the one with loom-like movements which packed impossibly thin wire into impossibly small boxes, and the one which threshed about as if it were struggling with an invisible enemy and did not seem to be producing anything.

The old lady walked delicately past them and down into the basement. She came to a gray door and knocked at it. At once she heard the three tramps fling themselves against the inside of the door and press against it, shouting

hoarsely across to each other.

Roberta was unable to shout, but she waited until they were silent and then called through the door as loudly as she could, "It's only me, boys."

After a moment's hush, the door opened a crack. Then it opened wide. Three seedy figures stood there, their faces anguished: Jerry, the ex-writer, and Tony and Dusty, who had never been and never would be anything but tramps. Jerry, the youngest, was forty, and so still had half his life to drowse through, Tony was fifty-five and Dusty had sweat rash.

"We thought you was the Terrible Sweeper!" Tony exclaimed.

The terrible sweeper swept right through the factory every morning. Every morning, the tramps had to barricade themselves in their room, or the sweeper would have bundled them and all their tawdry belongings into the disposal chutes.

"You'd better come in," Jerry said. "Excuse the muddle."

Roberta entered and sat down on a crate, tired after her journey. The tramps' room made her uneasy, for she suspected them of bringing Women in here occasionally; also, there were pants hanging in one corner.

"I had something to tell you all," she said. They waited politely, expectantly. Jerry cleaned out his nails with a tack.

"I've forgotten just now what it is," she confessed.

The tramps sighed noisily with relief. They feared anything which threatened to disturb their tranquillity. Tony became communicative.

"It's Christmas Day," he said, looking round furtively.

"Is it really!" Roberta exclaimed. "So soon after Lent?"

"Allow us," Jerry said, "to wish you a safe Christmas and a persecution-free New Year."

This courtesy brought Roberta's latent fears to the surface at once.

"You—you don't believe in the New Father Christmas, do you?" she asked them. They made no answer, but Dusty's face went the colour of lemon peel and she knew they did believe. So did she.

"You'd better all come up to the flat and celebrate this happy day," Roberta said. "After all, there's safety in numbers."

"I can't go through the factory: the machines bring on my sweat rash," Dusty said. "It's a sort of allergy."

"Nevertheless, we will go," Jerry said. "Never pass a kind offer by."

Like heavy mice, the four of them crept up the stairs and through the engrossed factory. The machines pretended to ignore them.

In the flat, they found pandemonium loose. The kettle was boiling over and Robin was squeaking for help. Officially bed-ridden, Robin could get up in times of crisis; he

stood now just inside the bedroom door, and Roberta had to remove the kettle before going to placate him.

"And why have you brought those creatures up here?" he demanded in a loud whisper.

"Because they are our friends, Robin," Roberta said, struggling to get him back to bed.

"They are no friends of mine!" he said. He thought of something really terrible to say to her; he trembled and wrestled with it and did not say it. The effort left him weak and irritable. How he loathed being in her power! As caretaker of the vast factory, it was his duty to see that no undesirables entered, but as matters were at present he could not evict the tramps while his wife took their part. Life really was exasperating.

"We came to wish you a safe Christmas, Mr. Proctor" Jerry said, sliding into the bedroom with his two companions.

"Christmas, and I got sweat rash!" Dusty said.

"It isn't Christmas," Robin whined as Roberta pushed his feet under the sheets. "You're just saying it to annoy me." If they could only know or guess the anger that stormed like illness through his veins.

At that moment, the delivery chute pinged and an envelope catapulted into the room. Robin took it from Roberta, opening it with trembling hands. Inside was a

Christmas card from the Minister of Automatic Factories.

"This proves there are other people still alive in the world," Robin said. These other fools were not important enough to receive Christmas cards.

His wife peered short-sightedly at the Minister's signature.

"This is done by a rubber stamp, Robin," she said. "It doesn't prove anything."

Now he was really enraged. To be contradicted in front of these scum! And Roberta's cheeks had grown more wrinkled since last Christmas, which also annoyed him. As he was about to flay her, however, his glance fell on the address on the envelope; it read, "*Robin Proctor, AFX10.*"

"But this factory isn't X10!" he protested aloud. "It's SC541."

"Perhaps we've been in the wrong factory for thirty-five years," Roberta said. "Does it matter at all?"

The question was so senseless that the old man pulled the bed-clothes out of the bottom of the bed.

"Well, go and find out, you silly old woman!" he shrieked. "The factory number is engraved over the output exit. Go and see what it says. If it does not say SC541, we must leave here at once. Quickly!"

"I'll come with you," Jerry told the old lady.

"You'll all go with her," Robin said. "I'm not having you stay here

with me. You'd murder me in my bed!"

Without any particular surprise—although Tony glanced regretfully at the empty teapot as he passed it—they found themselves again in the pregnant layers of factory, making their way down to the output exit. Here, conveyor belts transported the factory's finished product outside to waiting vehicles.

"I don't like it much here," Roberta said uneasily. "Even a glimpse of outside aggravates my agoraphobia."

Nevertheless, she looked where Robin had instructed her. Above the exit, a sign said "X10."

"Robin will never believe me when I tell him," she wailed.

"My guess is that the factory changed its own name," Jerry said calmly. "Probably it has changed its product as well. After all, there's nobody in control; it can do what it likes. Has it always been making these eggs?"

They stared silently at the endless, moving line of steel eggs. The eggs were smooth and as big as ostrich eggs; they sailed into the open, where robots piled them into vans and drove away with them.

"Never heard of a factory laying eggs before," Dusty laughed, scratching his shoulder. "Now we'd better get back before the Terrible Sweeper catches up with us."

Slowly they made their way back up the many, many steps.

"I think it used to be television sets the factory made," Roberta said once.

"If there are no more men—there'd be no more need for television sets," Jerry said grimly.

"I can't remember for sure. . . ."

Robin, when they told him, was ill with irritation, rolling out of bed in his wrath. He threatened to go down and look at the name of the factory himself, only refraining because he had a private theory that the factory itself was merely one of Roberta's hallucinations.

"And as for *eggs* . . ." he stutted.

Jerry dipped into a torn pocket, produced one of the eggs, and laid it on the floor. In the silence that followed, they could all hear the egg ticking.

"You didn't oughta done that, Jerry," Dusty said hoarsely. "That's . . . interfering." They all stared at Jerry, the more frightened because they did not entirely know what they were frightened about.

"I brought it because I thought the factory ought to give us a Christmas present," Jerry told them dreamily, squatting down to look at the egg. "You see, a long time ago, before the machines declared all writers like me redundant, I met an old robot writer. And this old robot writer had been put out to scrap, but he told

me a thing or two. And he told me that as machines took over man's duties, so they took over his myths too. Of course, they adapt the myths to their own beliefs, but I think they'd like the idea of handing out Christmas presents."

Dusty gave Jerry a kick which sent him sprawling.

"That's for your ideal!" he said. "You're mad, Jerry boy! The machine'll come up here to get that egg back. I don't know what we ought to do."

"I'll put the tea on for some kettle," Roberta said brightly.

The stupid remark made Robin explode.

"Take the egg back, all of you!" he shrieked. "It's stealing, that's what it is, and I won't be responsible. And then you tramps must leave the factory!"

Dusty and Tony looked at him helplessly, and Tony said, "But we got nowhere to go."

Jerry, who had made himself comfortable on the floor, said without looking up, "I don't want to frighten you, but the New Father Christmas will come for you, Mr. Proctor, if you aren't careful. That old Christmas myth was one of the ones the machines took over and changed; the New Father Christmas is all metal and glass, and instead of leaving new toys he takes away old people and machines."

Roberta, listening at the door, went as white as a sheet. "Perhaps that's how the world has grown

so depopulated recently," she said. "I'd better get us some tea."

Robin had managed to shuffle out of bed, a ghastly irritation goading him on. As he staggered towards Jerry, the egg hatched.

It broke cleanly into two halves, revealing a pack of neat machinery. Four tiny, busy mannikins jumped out and leapt into action. In no time, using minute welders, they had forged the shell into a double dome; sounds of hammering came from underneath.

"They're going to build another factory right in here, the saucy things!" Roberta exclaimed. She brought the kettle crashing down on the dome and failed even to dent it. At once a thin chirp filled the room.

"My heavens, they are wirelessly for help!" Jerry exclaimed. "We've got to get out of here at once!"

They got out, Robin twittering with rage, and the New Father Christmas caught them all on the stairs.

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For the past 5 years G. Harry Stine led an interesting but peaceful life, working on the rocket research staff at White Sands and occasionally (as "Lee Correy") writing s.f. Then last August he took a designing job with the Glen L. Martin missile plant in Denver. Also in August he published a timely book called EARTH SATELLITES AND THE RACE FOR SPACE SUPERIORITY (Ace). On October 4 the United States, momentarily at least, lost that race. On October 5 the wire services reported Mr. Stine as saying, "We have underestimated the Russians all along. We lost five years between 1945 and 1950 because nobody would listen to the rocket men. We have to catch up those five years fast, or we're dead." Within a matter of hours, the Martin Company announced that "the discharge of Harry Stine was effective immediately" and "would give no reason for the discharge." I at once suggested to Mr. Stine that the readers of F&SF would be interested in further comments from him, and by October 15 he had completed the following article.

Undoubtedly there are countless contributory factors to account for our laggard position in the space race, from the division of the human spoils at Peenemünde through the attitude of the ex-Secretary of Defense to the difference in mathematics-teaching in American and Russian grade schools. There are certainly other factors which cannot yet be discussed publicly. But Harry Stine, who has more personal acquaintance with our rocket program than any other professional writer, probes for a deeper, more basic reason.

Sputnik: One Reason Why We Lost

by G. HARRY STINE

IN 1775, A GROUP OF UNDISCIPLINED, unruly Massachusetts riflemen "fired the shot heard round the world." In October, 1957, somewhere in the Kara Kum Desert

east of the Caspian Sea, a group of Communist rocketmen fired a shot which was, literally, heard around the world. The "beep-beep-beep" of the *sputnik*, the Soviet unmanned

satellite, came to the ears of anyone in the world who had a radio capable of tuning to 20 or 40 megacycles.

This contemporary "shot heard round the world" shook American citizens to their very cores. It was unthinkable that a communistic society could conquer space before we could. After all, weren't we secure in our belief that our country could build anything bigger and faster and better than any other country?

The first reaction of Americans was disbelief. It couldn't have happened! It was communist propaganda! But . . . the persistent "beep-beep-beep" of the *sputnik* came from countless radio loudspeakers.

The second reaction followed within several days. Everyone in the United States looked around and wondered, "How did it happen? Why did the Russian communists beat us to the draw?" After all, didn't we have the world's first unmanned satellite and its vehicle, almost ready to go but somehow plagued with troubles which had set it five months behind schedule?

There are many reasons why it happened the way it did. Some of them are contemporary, some of them can be remedied, but some of them go far back into our history. No single one of us is to blame; all of us are to blame, and even our ancestors must share part of that blame because they formu-

lated the spirit and thought of this country.

Although this country is the finest thing that has happened to the human race in all history, it has had its faults and shortcomings from the very beginning. This is something that few people realize, perhaps because of the fact that our very history has made us into a confident, almost arrogant people secure in our belief in American Perfectability, a belief which was well founded in our culture by 1830.

Almost everyone has forgotten just what this country was like when it began a rather precarious existence in 1776. Few people realize that the American Colonies comprised a mere 2,500,000 people existing in small scattered communities up and down the Atlantic seaboard of the North American continent. We were a poor and motley collection of people, all distrusting each other and hating the British Crown. In the 1770's, there were only 5 men in the Colonies who spent more than \$10,000 a year on themselves and their families. Only half of the towns in Massachusetts had schools, but that colony levied a one shilling fine on any parent who neglected his children's education! The colony of Virginia was deliberately illiterate; there were very few schooled people even among the planters. (These facts will probably bring the wrath of certain organizations

down around my head, but they are facts nonetheless!) There were in all the 13 colonies fewer than 300 men in college, and the colleges were graduating only 50 men a year.

Towering far above the mutual distrust of the colonies for each other and their united hatred for the Crown was the awful fear of the Wilderness which began less than 100 miles west of the coastline and ran for an unknown distance to the Pacific. Beyond the scattered towns, villages, and farms was the silent, brooding forest, the endless, sweeping plains, and the towering, remorseless mountains. It was unknown, but it had to be conquered.

This awareness of the Wilderness touched every facet of American life at the time. To some extent, it still does. It determined our national character and the nature and course of our science and technology. We had no use for petty theories and useless hypotheses; leave those to the Europeans who did not face a wilderness! We needed tools and techniques for the conquest of the Wilderness.

As a result, Americans became more pragmatic than any people in history, including the Romans. The pragmatic philosophy itself is an American product. Our science became a strategy for exploring and settling the unknown world to the west of us.

And what did we have to start

with in this conquest of the Wilderness? *Nothing*. We had no scientists, no engineers. We had tradesmen, but these tradesmen were quite inferior to the European craftsmen. In America a tradesman could not specialize; he had to be a jack-of-all-trades in order to make any sort of a living at all. Because of the British Mercantile Treaty, Americans were forbidden to engage in the arts and crafts based on natural phenomena; this deprived Americans of the necessary incentive to pursue these crafts. When we won our independence, we found ourselves woefully short of everything needed to fight the Wilderness.

The first 50 years of our history as a country were devoted to attempting to remedy this situation. We developed Yankee Ingenuity. We became gadgeteers, interested in the pragmatic application of ideas and not in the ideas themselves. Our original scientists and engineers had other professions—Franklin was famed as a printer in the United States, but as a scientist abroad; Robert Fulton was an artist, as was Morse.

By 1830, 50 years after our fight for independence, we had developed the concept of Manifest Destiny and the American Perfectability. Strangely enough, we did this without developing any scientists or engineers of real note. Until about 1850, an engineer was a man who erected and worked the

engines of war—towers, catapults and fortifications—and was considered only a skilled craftsman. There were no engineering colleges or curriculums in America until after the Civil War.

Only 500 patents had been granted by 1838, yet Americans had developed—probably in self-defense—a belief that “The Yankee Nation Can Beat All Creation!” Practical inventors were glorified in the American mind of the time.

And American inventors starved when they persisted in working with devices which had, as far as the layman was concerned, no practical value whatsoever.

Our tune had changed by the time the Centennial rolled around in 1876. We had just fought the greatest war in our history and the first of the modern wars. Gold had been discovered in the West, and, lured by that golden promise, men had won the West, a portion of the continent which had hitherto been peopled only by trappers and explorers. (Who counted Mexicans and Indians?)

Our engineering had also, in a way, blossomed. We had pride in our past engineering achievements now, and we put our reliance on precedent in our engineering design. Our railway coaches resembled the stagecoaches from which their design had been taken. Our architecture embodied concepts of Greece and Rome while being based on iron structures. We did

not like radical designs or ideas. (We still don't. The popularity of one of the new portable electric mixers is based on the fact that it resembles an electric iron, a fact which came to light in a study done to determine just what the mixer should look like to have the greatest sales appeal!)

From the 1870's through the early 1900's, our invention and science continued to be dedicated to individual freedom. But during the First World War, a new note crept in: the concept of a “team.” Our practical science and technology took on such wide ramifications during that period that it became apparent that no one man could know it all. Research teams developed.

And while the rise of the team concept was going on, a man by the name of Langmuir was turned loose in the General Electric laboratories, working on what he pleased, on what interested him, on what nudged his curiosity. The serendipitous* results of Langmuir's work, along with others such as Steinmetz, made General Electric into the largest corporation of its kind, controlling more money and manpower than the

*serendipity—the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for; a word coined by Walpole, in allusion to a tale, “The Three Princes of Serendip,” who in their travels were always discovering, by chance or by sagacity, things they did not seek.

empires of the Hohenzollerns or the Napoleons. Inventions and science dedicated to individual freedom had created untold wealth and personal power as a by-product.

Yet the rise of the team concept continued. The lone inventor working in his basement shop became an item in the history books. The inventors and scientists became "other-directed" men, always prodding for an improved method or technique for use in the particular company's product, always looking for the obvious as determined by conferences, always attempting to satisfy the desires of the Front Office run by lawyers, bankers, and others who didn't know an electron from Uncle George. It became the vogue in these teams to "play safe," to "get along," to get that raise or that directorship of the lab by not taking chances.

There was no room, no place, no niche in these teams for the individualistic inventor who had developed the devices and basic principles on which our entire technology is based.

In addition, our present-day science is spoiled . . . spoiled rotten. The interferometer with which Slipher discovered the red-shift of the far galaxies at Lowell Observatory would be thrown into the junk heap by the physics department of the country's poorest college. I know; I've seen it. A scientist or research team today feels it

must have multi-million-dollar set-ups of test equipment and rooms full of very impressive gadgetry in order to justify the fact that it is accomplishing something. We may have forgotten an important factor in scientific work: it is not the appearance or cost or amount of equipment that counts. It is the *mind* of the man who operates the equipment.

Why did the communists beat us into space with their *sputnik*? It is not because they have a better system of living together, nor because they have better scientists.

It may be because we have consistently underestimated them. The predominant belief of 100 years ago that "The Yankee Nation Can Beat All Creation" still lingers with us, even in this age of science and with the knowledge that "Science Knows No Country."

Basically, it boils down to four points fixed in our nation's history and development:

1. Our pragmatic approach to knowledge was excellent for the conquest of the Wilderness, but may not be quite so wonderful in the conquest of the greater Unknown. We distrust basic scientific research that does not know what answers it may get.

2. We have a historical lack of appreciation of science itself. The Europeans don't. Until very recently, the greater part of the basic research in science was carried out in Europe. We do not basically

understand or appreciate the nature of serendipitous discoveries.

3. Our science is spoiled. We do not believe we can accomplish results with simple equipment. We feel we must add complexity to complexity to achieve results. We understand gadgets and feel we *must* have them to bolster our thinking, for we do not truly understand what thinking is.

4. The growth of the team in our scientific and engineering work has nearly killed the individualistic approach which produced the basic groundwork for our present-day technology. If a team member speaks out for himself, he becomes dangerous to the integrity of the team.

What can we do in order to prevent a future *sputnik* incident from putting us firmly in the back seat in terms of national prestige and personal pride in our country? In the first place, aping the opposition won't do us a bit of good; our national beliefs will not tolerate their methods or approach. Nor will it help to go into panic and hysteria, grabbing at every straw in the wind and falling back on a shotgun approach.

If we are to survive as a nation in a world of science and an age of flight into space, we must gain a better understanding of our own scientific shortcomings.

We must learn to temper our pragmatic approach with a reali-

zation that apparently useless work can yield tremendous benefits.

We must learn to appreciate basic knowledge itself.

We must realize that our knowledge comes from the mind of man and not from devices, and that knowledge may come in strange ways from the minds of men.

We have conquered the Wilderness of our forefathers and now lie athwart a continent, 170,000,000 strong, with a way of life which the founding fathers could not possibly have envisioned. We have created our own type of Utopia, carrying with us the beliefs of an age long dead into an age where distance is measured only in terms of the time necessary to traverse it. The sovereign nation of arrogant Yankee gadgeteers with a Manifest Destiny has arisen to take its place among the nations of the world with an overwhelming desire to be liked by everyone; and has managed, in spite of blunders and shortcomings and red tape and getting caught standing when the contest started, to survive and grow.

We now stand on the edge of a greater Wilderness. Perhaps now we should stop to consider ourselves and decide where we want to go from here.

In spite of the fact that the *sputnik* was perhaps the worst blow we have received in our so-called "soft" solar plexus, it may turn out to be just what we needed.

This is the fourth of Mark Clifton's fascinating novelets concerning the improbable problems of Ralph Kennedy, Personnel Director at Computer Research, who finds himself hiring such characters as a pre-adolescent girl complete with poltergeist and a fake swami with genuine psionic powers. The earlier stories—all taking their titles from the Pope couplet quoted below—have not (I regret to say) appeared in these pages; but if you've been so unfortunate as to miss them, don't worry: This final episode is complete in itself, with drama, humor, the authenticity guaranteed by Mr. Clifton's own long experience as a personnel director, and an unorthodox suggestion as to the possible nature of those unclassifiabilia which we know as psi.

Remembrance and Reflection

by MARK CLIFTON

*Remembrance and reflection how allied!
What thin partitions sense from thought divide!*

Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, I: 225-6

"YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HYPNOTISM, Sara?" I asked my secretary when she brought in my share of the morning's memos.

She dropped the papers into my in box and backed away from the desk as if it were a hot fire.

"Now Mr. Kennedy," she began warily. "You're not going to start stirring things up again are you?" She looked as if she wanted to run right back to her own office, and maybe right on out of the plant.

"Isn't it about time?" I wondered.

"Why don't you let sleeping dogs lie, Mr. Kennedy?" she asked plaintively. "It's been so nice these last few months."

"Can't think of anything more useless than a sleeping dog lying around," I grumbled. "That's the trouble. Trouble with everybody. Everybody's massively fed, massively diverted, massively tranquilized—"

"Peace, it's wonderful," she murmured.

"Most dangerous condition this country ever faced," I said. "Want to know something, Sara? Even the usually discontented intellectuals have gone over to this happy-happy kick where anybody who views-with-alarm is a you-know-what. Scares me, Sara, when all the rest of the world—"

"Every time you get like this things happen around Computer Research," Sara complained. "Why can't you be just an ordinary Personnel Director? Why can't you be contented just doing an ordinary job like everybody else?"

"What, for instance, am I neglecting in my ordinary job?"

"There's enough in those memos to keep you busy—"

"I'll tell you what's in those memos even before I look at them," I interrupted. "There'll be one from Safety Engineering complaining that a certain supervisor fishes bits of metal out of the machinery with his hands without shutting down the whole production line first, and that's the way fingers get smashed. There'll be a companion piece from the supervisor asking me to tell Safety Engineering to keep its nose out of his department, and if he wants to smash his fingers they're his fingers. Big challenge to Personnel, Sara."

"You know what accidents do to our insurance rates," she reminded.

"I know what overprotection

does to production," I reminded back. "Then there'll be a memo," I went on, "from the Chief of Security Guards complaining that the Maintenance Supervisor refuses to stop for positive identification when he passes through security check points. The companion to that will be from the Maintenance Supervisor complaining that he passes every one of those unprintable security guards twenty times a day and if they don't know who his great grandmother kissed on her first date by now they never will and the whole thing is a bunch of nonsense anyhow—everybody playing Junior G-Man."

"That was yesterday's memos," Sara said loftily.

"All right," I answered. "Idea's the same. For instance I haven't had a complaint for quite a while from Office Supply that the design engineers refuse to turn in old pencil stubs when they want new ones—and you can't tell me they're really doing it."

"I'll keep an eye out for it, and rush it right in to you when it comes," Sara promised, and tossed her long bob of red hair.

"You know what worries me the most of all, Sara?" I asked.

She looked wary again.

"The Pentagon," I said. "More specifically the Poltergeist Division. I haven't heard from the Poltergeist Division of the Pentagon in over a year."

"Well, you know these govern-

ment bureaus," Sara tried to console me. "They start out going to do big things. Everybody in them rushes around designing forms and reports and statistics to impress people. First thing, they get so snowed under with filling out those forms, making those reports, and compiling those statistics there just isn't any time left to *do* anything. You should try it, Mr. Kennedy. Nothing like big charts and graphs and engineering curves done in colored inks to impress people with how important you are. Cover your desk and your walls with those, and you won't need to do anything at all. Except, maybe, keep them dusted."

I ignored her.

"Even General Sandfordwaithe has stopped hounding me," I said. "Ever since the George incident, he's left me strictly alone."

"You should be glad."

"It worries me, Sara. It worries me a lot. When our own Pentagon gets so massively . . . well massively something that it stops hounding us scientists—"

"You scientists!" she scoffed. Then, lest she had gone too far, "All his hounding didn't help you to produce more anti-grav units."

"That's something else," I said. "That fake Swami sits over there in his plush laboratory, holding hands with the female production line workers, and so far he hasn't learned a thing about how to activate anti-grav cylinders on any

kind of a dependable schedule."

"So what can you do about it?" she asked, not with curiosity but with a tone telling me I should accept the inevitable, like everybody else.

"Maybe hypnotism . . ." I began.

"This is where I came in," she answered. And went out.

I got up and followed her to the connecting door between our offices. She had already sat down back of her own desk, and now couldn't very well escape without making a point of it. I leaned against the door jamb.

"Do you think you'd have time to run over to the UCLA library this morning," I asked, "to see if you can pick up anything on the relationship of hypnosis to psi—if any?"

She looked at her own in box pointedly. It was stacked up a foot thick, a mute reminder that she tried to take over all the detail work and leave me with only the creative.

Creative! As, for example, I should go over to Design Engineering and say, "Please, fellows, would you mind trying to cooperate a little with Industrial Engineering's ideas and save up your pencil stubs?" I already knew what Industrial Engineering could do with pencil stubs. I didn't need Design Engineering to tell me.

Or maybe go over to Industrial Engineering and say, "Look, fel-

lows, did it ever occur to you that it might not be maximum efficiency to bring Design Engineering minds down to the level of saving up pencil stubs?" I already knew their answer, too, about what the creative geniuses really designed and passed around when they thought nobody was looking, and how it would be raising, not lowering, their mind level to get them considering costs. This was creative personnel?

"Never mind," I said. "I'll find time during the morning to go over to the library. Maybe that would be better, because I know what I want." I stood there for a moment. "I think I know what I want," I amended.

I closed the door and went back to my desk. I picked up the stack of interoffice memos. The top one was from Old Stone Face, Mr. Henry Grenoble, the General Manager. He mentioned, rather gently I thought, that I hadn't been caught trying to wreck the Company for quite a while now, and what was I doing? Just sitting around drawing my pay?

I felt better. I had seen the evidence of George taking over more and more of the production functions of Computer Research, and the workers getting more and more like ants who knew exactly what they were supposed to do from some central source that had no corporeal identity. Marvelously efficient, and I was afraid Old Stone

Face had let it soothe him into tranquility. Apparently he hadn't. I didn't feel so alone now.

My drive to the UCLA library turned out to be a waste of time. Oh, there had been a few half hearted attempts to rouse psi through hypnotism, with results about as indecisive as other experiments. It looked as if I'd have to do my own experiments. As I leafed through the few references, I wondered how I'd be as a hypnotist.

Of course I might get the Swami to help me, but the habit of faking was so deeply ingrained in his character one couldn't tell when he was being honest because he didn't know, himself.

I managed to snag a couple of profs in the psych department, but my questions on the subject were met with much the same disdain as if I'd asked for the real truth about Unidentified Flying Objects. I should have known. There is a breed who calls himself a scientist but is really concerned only with maintaining a reputation for esoteric knowledge. As soon as the layman picks up the idea, he drops it like a hot coal, for to be identified with it now would associate him with the untouchables. Bridey Murphy and various television programs had vulgarized hypnotism until these men, whose only real concern was their own prestige, wouldn't touch it. They had the same attitude toward psi—and for the same reason.

As I climbed back into my car, I reflected that fortunately there were a few, not many but some, who were more concerned with knowledge than with REPUTATION. Lucky mankind! Otherwise . . .

When I got back to the plant, Sara had a surprise waiting for me in my office. Another colonel from the Pentagon.

"Logart," he identified himself. To his credit he did not add and emphasize, "*Colonel* Logart." He let the eagles on his collar speak for themselves. He did add, "Poltergeist Division, Pentagon," but his face broke into a broad grin when he said it.

Out of his uniform he would have been more or less nondescript, displaying none of that rugged, masculine handsomeness of the fair-haired career men in the services and denoting a possible latent something-or-other in high places. I nodded, shook hands perfunctorily, and waved him to the crying chair in front of my desk.

"Know anything about mass hypnotism?" I asked as an opener.

"After fifteen years in the service?" he countered. "What do you think basic training and all that comes after it might be?"

I'd been looking at him, but now I did a sort of double take and really saw him for the first time.

"Well now," I grinned as broadly as he. "How have you managed to survive?"

He took my question at face value.

"One of the more or less valid facts about hypnotism is that you can't be hypnotized if you don't want to be. Of course that presupposes you know what is happening—as most don't. But I knew. And I also knew that the only way to survive that, or any other mass hypnotism framework, was to become so completely imitative that no one would realize I knew I was imitating."

"Well now," I said again. "You and I might be able to work together. We've had a series of stuffed pouter pigeons, and—"

"I know," he interrupted. "You've got yourself quite a reputation back at the Pentagon, Kennedy. For bringing an end to fine, promising careers, that is. We've got plenty of brave men who can stand up under bullets, or bombs, or even ridicule when it comes in from the outside. But when a man becomes ridiculous in his own eyes . . . You've got quite a nasty faculty for that, Kennedy." He'd stopped grinning, but his eyes were still twinkling with real mirth. Yet a man who could consciously learn to be so imitative as to give the illusion he thought he was being, creative could succeed in simulating almost anything. So I could only hope the mirth was real.

"That's why it was relatively easy for me to get assigned to this

Company. General Sanfordwaithe was in a hole. He could order men to their death under fire without a twinge, because that's part of the hypnosis. But to order career suicide is something else. So I expect he was pretty relieved when I volunteered, or rather when I begged for the assignment."

He stopped and looked at me.

"Of course there's more," I said, and pushed a box of cigarettes across the desk to him. He took one, lit it, and so did I.

"Yes," he said. "There's more. Considerably more."

"Naturally."

"I'm interested in George," he said. "I've always known that sooner or later a George would come on the scene. That is, if I got the story straight. Would you mind . . ."

I repeated the story of George for him. How these five young college grads came to me with the yarn that through mental identification, interplay and feed back, they had succeeded in creating a super-entity, an incorporeal being for which they were merely body, hands and feet. Unlike the fleeting entity that comes into being in a mob, or other gathering of people with mental feedback and interplay, George was a permanent, an enduring—ah—personality? quality? being?—anyhow, whatever.

I told him how I had tried for months to find something that only a George could do, some-

thing that five unconnected guys couldn't do, something that required instant communication and coordination. I told him how I'd failed to think of anything because science and industry are both constructed to compensate for the lack of instant communication and coordination. I told him how George had gradually reached out and begun to take over the operation of the production planning functions of the plant; the furor caused by getting contracts out on time, for a change; the investigation and demonstration to the Pentagon officers of his reality as an entity. And the demonstration of his power.

"Demonstration of one of his powers," I amended. "What other powers he might have, or develop, I've . . . I've been a little too nervous to find out."

He nodded as if he understood and crushed out the butt of his cigarette in my ashtray.

"Pretty much as stated in the report," he conceded. "I was afraid it might have been—ah—interpreted. Strike you as peculiar that you couldn't think of anything for George to do?"

"Yes," I said emphatically. "There was a teasing, tantalizing feeling that there must be dozens, hundreds of things. Only I could never bring one right out into the foreground. Like a word or a name on the tip of our tongue that annoys because it will neither come clear nor go away."

"One of the interesting aspects of hypnotism," he said as if he were veering away from the subject, or maybe coming back to it. "The subject is partially conscious and knows things exist beyond his will's reach. But he can only think and act according to the compulsions given him, the things consistent with the framework of his commands. Ever occur to you that what you call 'frameworks' might be a kind of compulsion boundary you can't cross? You say industry and science is organized to compensate for the lack of instant communication and coordination because such things can't exist among people. Something for George to do would be outside your frame of compulsions."

"Look," I said. "Aren't you extending the definition of hypnotism a little far? After all, a word, too, has certain semantic boundaries."

"Who can draw the line," he asked, "between hypnotism and suggestion? Where does suggestion leave off and teaching begin? Where does propaganda leave off and belief begin? Where is the line between belief and compulsion? Where is the boundary between compulsion and hypnotism?"

"The music goes round and round," I said flippantly. But flippancy was a cover-up for some powerful mixed emotions I hadn't yet sorted out. More than the words, it was the semantic overtones back

of them, such as the implications in substituting the word *teaching* and *propaganda*. By that, did he mean all teaching?

Personnel people, accustomed to twenty different versions a day of the only possible right way to think, become detached and are able to see these versions in perspective. But I felt something different from that—a glimpse of such far vision that I could look down on human beings, like two-dimensional creatures, forever imprisoned within the narrow walls of their compulsions, unable to break through the hypnotic suggestions of their frameworks. But only a glimpse.

For that comprehension was replaced by a reaction far less exalted. A deep disappointment. I'd run into his pattern before, on quite a few occasions. I had him pegged, classified. The mental exhibitionist. A fellow who dreams up startling things to say to gain attention and impress people. They don't need to mean anything, just sound as if they do. No doubt around the Pentagon, where the philosophical concepts must be at best on the primitive level—or the military framework couldn't exist at all—he'd made quite a splash with his semantic gymnastics. And, no doubt, he thought a display of his well-worn patter would push Kennedy over as easily.

After fifty thousand people or so, we never seem to get an original.

Even in the first few dozens we start getting carbon copies, people who occupy a duplicate framework, and therefore duplicate all the same problems inherent in the framework. The hope that we may—perhaps even today!—encounter an original keeps us able to endure the deadly monotony of repetition where each person thinks himself to be . . . different. My hope that today I had discovered one died.

Oddly, his interest in me seemed to die simultaneously. Perhaps it was my flippant remark, yet if he had been truly perceptive he would have known . . . Therefore his assumption that he hadn't impressed me, after all, was proof of the shallow level at which he operated. His eyes seemed to film over, grow remote. Outwardly he was still cordial, as was I. But rapport, for a few moments tantalizingly near, was gone. I understood him, and he was at least perceptive enough to realize it.

"Well," he said, after an appreciable pause, "I just dropped in to get acquainted. You understand, of course, that before discussing with you my real mission I must present it to your general manager, Mr. Grenoble."

"Of course," I agreed. "Never let it be forgotten that I'm just the Personnel Director here. I can't speak for the Company except at that level."

We stood up simultaneously. He reached across the desk and we

shook hands. His eyes looked at me as if he was perhaps a little sad at what they saw. And perhaps my eyes showed him the same. He was disappointed that he hadn't made an impression. I was disappointed that he had tried it on such an obvious level. He left.

The office seemed singularly empty and barren after he had gone. And that was odd, because if he hadn't made a deep impression, why should it? Had I been right in my first reaction, and not my second? Of course not. The man was an obvious poseur, transparently so. The pity of it was, he didn't need to be. Because there was something about him . . .

Something, like a word or a name on the tip of the tongue, wouldn't go away. Some hypnotic compulsion shut me off from . . . Nonsense!

II

The next day Old Stone Face and Colonel Logart left for Washington. The deal proposed by the Pentagon must have been a good one, interesting enough to cause the general manager to make the trip. Henry gave me no hint before he left of what it might involve. Usually I can surmise what's in the wind, even when he thinks he's playing it close to his chest, because he wants this or that kind of expert. This time there was no such clue.

There was a clue as to the magnitude of the deal, for Old Stone Face stayed in Washington more than a week. This meant he had to hang around while a little time could be found here and there in the calendars of the big boys. From the time involved, some of these boys were right up there on the first team.

Still, there were a couple of straws in the wind. When Henry called me into his office for his going-away pep talk, which usually amounted to instructions to kind of keep an eye on the store while he was out to lunch, he betrayed at least one source of interest.

"How's George doing these days, Ralph?" he asked with what he considered to be a disinterested, friendly smile. On him it always looked like an earthquake splitting open the side of a granite mountain.

"Your production reports will tell you better than I can," I said. "He's practically taken over the running of production. I don't know about you, but it's cut my work in half. Grievances have dropped off to practically nothing."

"I can't complain about production quantity or quality," he conceded. Which, for him, was like saying that output was exceeding his wildest dreams.

"I'm borrowing trouble, I know," I said. "But somehow I'm a little uneasy."

I could see by the disappearance of the crack in the granite cliff that he was getting ready for the bad news. He didn't say anything.

"You know, Henry," I said hesitantly, "I get the feeling of a little boy absorbed with playing train. I sometimes wonder what's going to happen if he gets bored with the gadgets, and starts looking around to see what else might be interesting. Anyhow," I said idly, "Playing train belongs to an older generation. I get the feeling that George is still a very small boy, and today's small boys are interested in spaceships."

He flashed me a quick look from under his craggy brows to see if there was guile behind my words, thereby revealing the guile behind his.

"If the government made those boys a good offer, you think they'd leave us—and take George with them?"

"I'm not close to the boys," I said. "But I doubt it. Not if we had anything comparable. The government is killing the goose that lays the golden egg with its security attempts to make unusual people conform to mediocre standards. Scientists don't like to work for government, and wouldn't if they could get comparable deals in private industry. If we lose George it will be our own fault."

"Thank you, Ralph," he said absently, as if he had got the information he wanted.

"Have a good trip," I said as I went out the door. I doubt he heard me.

The other straw in the wind came from an unexpected direction. Sara set up an appointment for me to see Annie Malasek.

Annie Malasek, P-1 Assembler, had been with us a number of years now. She was the mother of Jennie Malasek, the little poltergeist girl who had first activated the Auerbach cylinders and made them into anti-grav units. I'd cut my own feet out from under me by helping Jennie to get out of the psi framework and over into normalcy—thereby winning the undying gratitude of her mother, Annie. In turn, Annie had helped me to pull a stunt on the fake Swami, who had been claiming psi powers, which proved he really had them, even though he had thought he was faking.

A little to my surprise, when Sara ushered Annie into my office, the Swami came with her. There was that intangible something surrounding the two of them that told me their news before he had finished seating her and found his own chair.

"We wanted you to be the first to know, Mr. Kennedy," Annie said, and simpered. "We're going to get married, Swami and me."

I stood up and came around from behind my desk.

"One look at the pair of you and anybody would know," I said

as I crossed the room. I took her hand in my left and his hand in my right, squeezed them, and brought their hands together. Swami was grinning like a foolish boy, and Annie began to cry like a foolish girl. I went back to my desk, opened a top drawer, fished out a clean handkerchief, and took it over to Annie. It wasn't the first time. Only this time her tears were not troubled. While Swami was wiping away her tears with tender care, I went back and sat down behind my desk.

I didn't know which to congratulate. By my standards the Swami was a pretty worthless catch, while Annie was a hard-working, faithful, loyal woman worth her weight in gold. Yet it wasn't my standards that had to be satisfied. Hers had been the drab, gray life of a poor factory worker, always struggling to make ends meet; and to her the Swami must have been all that was mysterious, romantic, wonderful. Perhaps his very worthlessness made him all the more precious. Certainly in the eyes of the various factory women who went in heavily for mysticism, she had walked off with the prize catch. Who was I to say that she should not have this triumph? Or that each of them should not have what was most needed—she to be folded in the physical arms of the mysterious infinite; he to have a woman who would joyfully work hard for him, keep him well fed.

I glanced at his white turban. Already she seemed to be doing his laundry. The customary dark grease mark around the edges had disappeared; and come to think of it I hadn't got that faint whiff of malodor from his heavy red-and-gold robe when I'd gone near him.

"Fine, fine," I said heartily, and meant it. "I can't think of anybody more suited to each other."

The faint look of wary apprehension behind the Swami's huge, liquid black eyes disappeared, and was replaced by real gratitude. Annie was melting all over. My approval had meant a great deal to them. But Annie was Annie, and her character shapelessness didn't last long.

"There was two things we had to see you about, Mr. Kennedy," she said. "The other was about Jennie."

"Oh?" I questioned. "I understood she was in grammar school and doing very well. Trouble?"

"No," she answered. "Not yet, anyhow. It's that new Colonel from Washington. He came to me about Jennie. He knew all about . . . about the trouble she used to have. He asked me if I'd let him see her, talk to her."

"Oh, he did?" I said. Apparently Colonel Logart was letting no grass grow under his feet. First those questions from Henry about George must have meant that Logart had talked to the five lads. Now Jennie.

"I don't want Jennie in trouble no more," Annie was saying. "She wasn't happy when she wasn't like other kids. Now she's like them and she's happy."

"Did Colonel Logart speak to you?" I turned to the Swami.

"Just casually," the Swami answered in his deep, sonorous tones. "But I agree with my little bride. I wouldn't want my daughter disturbed." It sounded very authoritative and firm. The term "little bride" didn't seem to sicken Annie the way it did me. She looked at him with adoration.

"Don't worry about it," I told the both of them. "If Colonel Logart brings up the subject again, send him to me."

"That's what I already did," Annie said, and stood up. Hastily the Swami jumped to his feet.

When they had gone, I picked up the phone and got young Jim Bellows in the Engineering Department.

"Did Colonel Logart approach you fellows about going to work for the government while he was here?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he answered readily. "We told him to see you. We wouldn't make a move without letting you know—not after all you've done for us and George."

"Thanks," I said, and hung up. Thanks, too, for loyalty.

I sent off a wire to Henry's hotel in Washington:

HAVE LEARNED LOGART

TRIED TO SHANGHAI OUR
SPECIAL EMPLOYEES, RE-
PEAT SPECIAL EMPLOYEES,
BEHIND MY BACK. POUR
IT ON, HENRY.

KENNEDY

His wire came back in a few
hours.

JUST WHAT I NEEDED TO
BEAR DOWN HARD.
THANKS, RALPH.

OLD STONE FACE

I looked at the telegram for several minutes before I found what was disturbing me. I was so used to thinking in that term that it merely bothered me, but didn't strike me.

I picked up the phone and called the mail room.

"Check the telegraph company for the accuracy of the signature on that message I just received," I said.

"I already did, Mr. Kennedy," the girl answered. "They insist he signed it that way himself."

"Oh well," I sighed. "I suppose that sooner or later he had to learn what we call him."

Colonel Logart came in to see me as soon as he and Henry got back from Washington. He stood before my desk and I didn't ask him to sit down.

"I want you to know," he said through thinned lips, "that in talking to your special employees, I was merely following orders."

My lips were equally thin. The common practice of pirating valuable employees is one in which I will not indulge and which I do not appreciate when others try it with me.

"You militarists," I said coldly, "seem to think that following orders justifies anything from a mild indignity to an outright criminal action. Talk about hypnotic frameworks! We may have become a militarist nation, but we're not under martial law just yet."

He sat down on the edge of the crying chair, without invitation, and pursed his lips as if to hide the twitch of amusement. He made no effort to hide the twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, I don't know," he said speculatively. "In the life of an individual don't you find he spends the most of his money on what he wants most? So take a look at our national budget."

"There are such things as necessities of life," I said, "that determine how a person or a nation spends income."

"Well, Mr. Kennedy," he argued, soberly now, "don't you find, particularly in those whose thought stream runs shallow, that what one person considers to be a dire necessity he couldn't live without is something another person doesn't want and feels no need of whatever?"

"Goes back to group mores," I said. "If everybody . . ."

"Exactly," he agreed.

"I hardly think we can solve national policy, militaristic or otherwise," I said drily. "Not just between the two of us."

"No," he answered. "We can't. And that's something of enormous importance. Will you remember that, Mr. Kennedy? It will help you to understand, when . . ."

He trailed the sentence off and was silent. God help us, I classified it as more attempts to say startling things, that puny pattern of trying to be something special.

"I believe we're off the subject," I reminded him. "We were discussing your action of coming out here and trying to steal away some special employees behind my back."

"It's all part of the same big picture," he said.

"I'm sure it is. Did you bring along your ordnance maps and your pretty little colored pins to demonstrate the big picture?"

He ignored my sarcasm.

"Working on a certain government project would have been a long step upward for Jennie's mother, for example," he said, without responsive anger. "She'd never have to work again. Meantime, with her consent, and with Jennie's willing consent, we could try to restore Jennie's ability to activate anti-grav cylinders. Not the little toy things you have stored in your bolted-down vault here, but the real thing—big ones."

"Assuming you could do it," I

qualified. I lit a cigarette and pushed the box across the desk toward him. He took it as an invitation to slide down into a more comfortable position in the chair. He lit a cigarette.

"As for George," he continued through a puff of smoke, "how long do you think he will be content to play factory operation? One thing you seem to have overlooked, Kennedy. Jennie, Swami, George—they're all just children. Oh sure, the lads that make up George are mature young men, and Swami won't see thirty again, but as far as their psi development is concerned they're children. Children need to grow, and to grow they must have the kind of food they need to grow on."

"Assuming you know what psi food is," I said.

"Working on this certain government project would have given those young men real stature, and George something to challenge his growing mentality. Because, Kennedy," he said quietly, "we *were* able to think of something that only a George could do."

My arm froze with my cigarette lifted half way to my lips. I stared at him for a full minute, then, without taking another puff, I crushed out my cigarette in the tray.

"It was the way you went about it," I said slowly. "I've never stood in the way of an employee's chance at a real opportunity in my life."

He lifted an eyebrow, because it was a rash statement for any industry man to make.

"I know," I said. "Most companies operate on the policy of keeping a man where he can do them the most good, without much thought for what is good for the man. I don't. I operate on the policy that I'd rather have an ambitious, intelligent man for a short while than a stupid one forever. I've built a reputation around that. That's why the brightest and best are eager to come to work for us, because they know I'll try to push them upward, either in or out of the company. If you had come to me, instead of going behind my back—"

"You'd have given me your special employees," he said. "I knew that. So I made a mistake in the way I went about carrying out my orders: The mistake came to light when you sent that wire to Grenoble. So we didn't bring the psi children under government control with all its spying on employees, informing, watching them through little peekholes in false walls the way we watch the scientists. You think psi talented people could stand up under that?"

"Or," I said slowly, "having failed in your objective, you've been given a new set of orders to put the best possible interpretation on your mistake."

He shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"Whatever you prefer to think, Kennedy," he said easily. "The fact remains that Computer Research has the job which, heretofore, has been one of the most carefully guarded secrets under direct government operation."

"Because," I said, "George is necessary to it."

"George is necessary," he agreed. "Only a George could do it. Ever see the inside of the control cabin in one of the big, modern flying superforts, Kennedy?"

I nodded.

"No human mind can see all those instruments simultaneously and take the necessary actions, so we try to divide up the work and responsibility among various members of the flight crew. It works all right as long as everything goes all right, but when it doesn't we read about it in the papers. Almost every day, in fact, we read about it in the papers. And that's just the simple little problem of flying along over the Earth's surface, where all the factors are known and precalculated."

I waited. I gave him the benefit of my assumption that he didn't mean to make an ordinary flight crew out of George.

"If the problems of coordination are becoming more and more insurmountable in just flying through the air," he said, "think what the problems would be in traveling through space to another body."

"Sure," he went on, "we've been making progress with guided missiles, putting in servomechanisms to handle specific and known factors, but what about unknown factors? Or even a complexity of known factors would require a huge hall full of servomechanisms. Marvelous though it may be, the guided missile is a one track mind, equipped to do one thing, equipped to make only one choice when a given condition arises. And even there, the accuracy leaves much to be desired."

I didn't say anything. I could see what was coming.

"In approaching the problem of traversing space, we haven't had any choice, ourselves. We've had to attack it from the angle of a guided missile because no ordinary group of human beings could work together with the necessary instantaneous speed and direction to control the ship from the inside, to analyze unknown factors as they arise and take original, creative action among a multiple of choices."

"But George could," I said.

"George would have a chance of doing it," he qualified. "We've got to make a break-through somewhere. Either we have to take an entirely new approach to cybernetic machines, so we can get them down to payload dimensions, or we have to learn how to synthetically create more Georges. We've always assumed it had to be the former, but George may change

our minds. So now," he said, as he put his hands on his knees and began to stand up, "instead of taking George to the project, we're going to bring the project to George. I haven't talked to the boys about it. I came first to you for your permission."

"Quite a project," I said. "There's a long time and a lot of steps between deciding to build an inner-controlled spaceship and taking it up for a test."

"We'd like George to be in on it from the beginning," he answered. "It would be essential that he know everything there is to be known about the ship itself. Because, in space, we can't know which bit of knowledge will be vital."

"Whenever you're ready, I'll talk to the boys," I agreed.

"I'm ready now," he said. "The government has already taken steps to condemn that whole section of area next to your plant. The clearing and new construction will go fast. In the meantime, the design engineering can be picked up from where it has already been carried by the Pentagon staff. The boys are engineering-trained, but they'll have to be checked out on the specifics of this one."

"I trust you're prepared to listen to their ideas, instead of making them adopt yours," I said.

"Of course," he answered.

"Where do Jennie and the Swami come into the picture?"

"We expect to power it with anti-grav units," he said. "We couldn't get unlimited range, otherwise. To say nothing of maneuverability."

"I'll confirm with Henry," I said, and stood up also. "I'll talk with the boys. I'll talk with Jennie's mother and her new dad, the Swami. I'll talk with Jennie. It all depends on how willing they are."

I followed him to the door, and watched him go through Sara's office and on out of the department. I leaned up against the door jamb.

"I can't figure that fellow," I said to Sara. "First I thought he was the real McCoy. Then I thought he was a shallow blow-hard. Now I don't know."

"Nice to see that everybody isn't just a pawn on your chessboard," Sara said with a sigh.

"It's pretty certain I'm a pawn on his," I said. "But I don't know what game he's playing."

"Does he have to be playing any special game?" she asked.

"I don't even know that," I answered.

"My," she said, and her teasing smile broke up the sharpness of her words. "First thing you know, you're going to be down on the level of all the rest of us blind, stoopid pawns."

"Maybe I've never been above that level," I answered seriously. "Maybe I'm just a hypnotized victim of a framework, with one of my commands being to think I control my thoughts and actions."

"You lost me back there somewhere, Boss," she answered flipantly, and dug into her work box for another sheaf of reports.

Henry confirmed that we were now in the spaceship business, as a side line to our regular computer business, a not too improbable side line, since a spaceship without computer servomechanisms would be just a bulky hull. I would have my hands full, he warned me, in rounding up the necessary experts, even with all the help I could get from the government.

"The less help I get from the government, the better," I said drily. "Their ideas of merit are more concerned with a man's sex life, and what idle remark he may have made in an off moment twenty years ago, or whether he was ever arrested by some moronic cop. The more we get to be like Russia the less I like it. Have you ever noticed, Henry, that when a man takes on an enemy, he also takes on the characteristics of the enemy? Seems to work with nations, too."

"Very interesting," he commented impassively. "I thought we were talking about building a spaceship."

"There's a connection somewhere," I said. "Maybe it has to do with the fact that when you take on a framework you take on all the problems and defects inherent in it. Passing laws against

those defects is like making it a criminal offense for blue-eyed parents to have a blue-eyed child: if they're going to have children at all they'll be blue-eyed, criminal offense or none. So I don't want to get involved with the government's having anything at all to say about the kind of men we hire. Only thing I'll care about is have they got brains and are they still able to use them in spite of everything we've done to prevent it."

"Just so you get them," he said. "Logart is going to head up the project."

"Here we go again," I groaned. "They'll have to satisfy him."

"He's no longer a Colonel," Henry said. "Starting tomorrow he's just plain Mister Logart, private citizen."

"Shedding the uniform and the badges doesn't make him shed the frame of thinking," I argued. "That's how we became a militarist nation: we got saturated."

"You're not in a very constructive mood today, Ralph," he complained with enough irritation to show me I'd griped my limit. "You work with him the way you do with the rest of the supervisors. All he's got to say is whether the man is technically capable. Same as any other project head."

"I don't know what's the matter with me, Henry," I said slowly. "I don't trust Logart, I guess. There's something I can't put my finger on."

"He knows his business," Henry said. "Maybe better than any man in the country. I checked into that carefully. Everybody says he's *the* man for the job. If you're gonna build a spaceship, you got to put a man in charge that knows at least what one ought to look like. I don't. Do you?"

"It surprises me that he's such an expert. Maybe that's the trouble. He's always surprising me. He doesn't seem to fit—anywhere."

"Why should he fit something?"

"You walk out into the factory stores, Henry. We have thousands of parts, but they all fit somewhere in the machines we make. By knowing the machines and looking at the parts, you can tell just about what every part is for and where it fits. Now suppose you ran across a part that didn't belong. Wouldn't it bother you?"

"You keep telling me people aren't machines, Ralph."

"But they fit," I said. "They fit into a recognizable framework, all except a George, or a Jennie, and sometimes a Swa—"

My voice trailed off and I stared at Henry.

"You think he might be another one of those?" Old Stone Face asked.

"If he is," I said slowly, "he's concealed it. Or has he? Not belittling your negotiating ability any, Henry, but hasn't it seemed to you that we got into the spaceship business mighty quick and easy?"

Old Stone Face didn't answer for a minute. Then he heaved a big sigh, as if he'd been holding his breath all along.

"We're in it now," he said at last. "The way they fell over themselves around the Pentagon, giving me everything I wanted, made me think I was getting real good at my trade. Better keep an eye on Logart, Ralph. No telling what he might be up to."

"What could I do about it?" I asked.

III

My talk with the five boys was a little like the time when I interviewed them for jobs. I knew their names well by now, and of course I'd spoken to each of them a few times on the job. In their several departments I never seemed to have any trouble keeping the names straight, but as the five of them filed through my office door and took chairs, I couldn't sort out which name belonged to which face. It didn't matter.

Very briefly I told them about the project, and the part we hoped George could play.

"We knew"

"you could think of"

"something,"

"sir."

It was Numbers One, Two, Three and Four who had answered. Number Five nodded in agreement.

"Now I don't want to underestimate this," I warned. "It's new. You'll be the first to leave Earth in any kind of a ship. There'll be bugs, bound to be. A challenge to everything George has got."

"Yeah!" they breathed in ecstasy, their eyes shining.

"Physical danger," I said as impressively as I could. "All we've got is what we've surmised from the information that came back from the satellites. It seems like a lot. But on the other hand it isn't much, maybe not enough. Maybe we only think we can build the necessary mechanisms the first time. And, of course, we can only build to handle the known or suspected factors. There could be others."

Apparently they were communing with one another up on Cloud Nine, lost in such a roseate dream that, before I thought, I sniffed the air to see if there was any hint of a reefer's odor clinging to their clothes. Every now and then a young fellow came in who was really flying. But apparently they didn't need any help.

"You'll have a hand in designing the ship," I said, not sure whether I was talking to anybody or not. "You'll answer only to Mr. Logart, the head of the project. Naturally, your salaries will be raised commensurate with your new jobs."

Either that got through to them, or their silent conference was over.

"We've got some news for you, sir," Numbers Three and Five said simultaneously. "We're all going to be married."

"Not all to the same gi—" I said impulsively. "Of course not," I corrected myself hurriedly.

"Of course not," they agreed in chorus.

I wanted to ask them something, maybe to warn them, but in this area one man will rarely meddle with another man's intentions. I was alarmed about George. George's existence depended upon the five of them remaining in closest communion, but a young wife's first big project is to cut her new husband off from his past life and alienate all his old buddies. It's instinctive, and takes place even when neither the wife nor the husband wants it to happen. What would happen to George? Apparently they had thought of it, too.

"A year ago," they said, "when George was confined to just the five of us, it might have destroyed him. But not now. Anyhow, it's a pair of twins and a set of triplets, all sisters, so they know at least a little of what a George is like. It'll be all right, sir. You needn't worry. And . . . we do need wives, just like anybody else."

"Of course," I answered.

"They're very wonderful girls," Five said shyly.

"Of course," I said.

They looked at each other and their eyes sparkled with mischief.

"It's possible," Two said, "that in time there could be a Mrs. George."

I didn't say anything. They were in a framework I couldn't share.

"It must be spring," I finally gasped. "A regular epidemic."

"Yeah," they breathed, their eyes shining.

I went out into the factory and got a forelady's permission to talk to Annie Malasek on the job.

"Bother you, Annie, if I talk while you work?" I asked, when I came to a stop beside her workbench.

"Oh, no, sir," she said. "I can do this in my sleep."

Her fingers flying, pausing briefly, flying, pausing over a module, one of the more intricate parts of a computer, reminded me of butterflies hovering over a bed of flowers, darting in and out, pausing and tasting briefly. I caught the flush of pleasure on her face, and the sidelong look in her eyes when she checked to make sure it was duly noted in the department that I had come to see her instead of sending for her. Apparently that meant something.

"It's about Jennie," I said in a low voice just loud enough for her to hear me over the constant department hum. "Logart wants your permission to talk with her, and see if we can bring back any of her old—ah—abilities. It's very important now that we should try. If

you're willing, and if she's willing."

Her eyes flashed to my face quickly, and clung there questioning, anxious. But her fingers didn't falter.

"I don't want her throwing things without touching them," she said with a trace of that old stubbornness which was a major characteristic of hers before she and I had got to know one another, trust one another. "I don't want her setting fires without no matches. Them were old country ways, Slavonic mountain ways. We're Americans now, citizens. Jennie was lonesome and unhappy then. Now she's one of the most popular girls in her class and makes the best grades, even if I am her mother."

"She's older now," I said gently. "It's barely possible she would be able to move from one framework to the other at will."

Her eyes left my face and she looked down at the completed assembly. Expertly she whirled it beneath her hands, her sharp eyes inspecting every part. Satisfied, she lifted it from her stationary bench and put it on the moving belt line which ran beside the benches. She picked up the shell of another from the parts bin, and her fingers began darting in and out of smaller bins to pick up screws, bolts, wires. As if of their own volition, her fingers started putting the things into place. Her eyes came back to me.

"I don't understand about frameworks," she said.

"It's just a technical name for different conditions," I said. I very nearly used Einstein's phrase "co-ordinate system" and decided it would merely confuse things further. "For instance, when you were a girl in the Slav mountains where you came from, things were different from here. Things were true there that aren't true here."

"You can say that again," she agreed heartily.

"But you could go back there on a visit," I said. "Without losing your American citizenship. You could understand the old country ways because you grew up among them. At the same time, you would remember American ways, and when you came back you could pick up American ways again, without any trouble, because you understand those, too. It's what we mean by different frameworks."

"You think Jennie lived in a different . . ." She hesitated over the new word, tasting it for meaning. ". . . framework?"

"I'm pretty sure of it," I said.

"And she could travel back and forth without hurting herself?"

"Possibly. We don't know for sure."

"My," she said. "Think of that. That's some daughter I've got, eh, Mr. Kennedy?"

"You can say that again," I agreed.

"That Logart fellow," she said.

"He seems like a nice enough man. Awful young to be a full colonel. I guess it wouldn't do any harm for him to talk to Jennie—if you was there. You think it would do her any harm?"

"She wouldn't have to agree unless she wanted to," I said. "I'm not going to put any pressure on her. I made up my mind to that two, three years ago when I first got to know her."

"Then I'll tell her to come see you tomorrow when she gets out of school in the afternoon."

I started to leave, then turned back.

"How's Swami?" I asked.

Her face began to glow.

"He's the most wonderf—" She paused and then smiled teasingly. "But you wouldn't know anything about him in that framework."

I tried to picture Swami in the role of ardent lover. It wasn't too difficult. He probably would have made an art of it, a supplement to his art of fakery in reading palms, telling fortunes, gazing into the crystal ball. Perhaps it would be better if I didn't acknowledge that to Annie.

"No," I laughed. "I guess you're right. I wouldn't know anything about his abilities in that framework."

"Jennie's crazy about him," she said. "Sometimes I think those two understand each other better than I understand either one of them."

"Oh?" I said.

"They're two of a kind," she said. "They play games together." Then cryptically, she added, "But it's all right, because he's there to see that she don't come to no harm."

I felt my eyes widen a little. Perhaps we wouldn't have too much trouble in getting Jennie back into the old framework after all.

"They claim that together they can do things that neither one of them can do by themselves," she added.

"If they're that close," I said, "maybe Swami had better come with Jennie tomorrow afternoon."

Her face lit up and the last vestige of doubt left it.

"Then I know it will be all right," she said confidently.

I hoped so.

Sara kept Jennie and the Swami in the outer waiting room until Logart could be located. It wasn't difficult to find him. He'd left word with the switchboard that he'd be in conference with Old Stone Face and was to be notified immediately when I was ready. He left the conference at once, and I hoped Old Stone Face would realize that there really were times when a little girl and a fake swami might be more important than the general manager.

The three of them came in together and I introduced them as I gave them chairs.

"You're a bigger girl than I

thought you'd be," Logart said to Jennie. "Prettier, too."

I caught a flash of dark jealousy in Swami's eyes. Jennie, still in the pre-teen age of a child at one moment and a young lady the next, suddenly became a very demure and shy young lady. Apparently Logart caught the look in Swami's face, too, for he addressed most of his remarks to the man, and gradually I could see him winning over the highly temperamental, unstable personality.

I had visualized myself as carrying the conversational ball, drawing them out, bringing them closer together, and finally with great subtlety introducing the psi subject. Logart picked up the ball immediately and I became no more than a non-participating spectator. In fact, I wasn't quite sure that I caught all the plays, or understood fully those I did see.

Whatever it was that happened, Jennie was completely captivated. Yet it was to the Swami that she turned and drew closer. Suddenly I realized that it was no longer to Jennie as separate from the Swami, but both of them as a team that Logart was appealing. Logart had somehow caught the implications of the games that Swami and Jennie played together where as a team they could do things that neither could do separately.

Had Logart still been in uniform I might have credited the way they turned to him, accepted his leader-

ship, yes, domination over them as subservience to military command. But he had shed his uniform and badges, and had become an uncolorful, nondescript civilian. But not to them! They recognized something in him I could not see. They gave acquiescence long before it was asked. In fact, he never asked their agreement, he took it for granted. And they gave it in the same spirit.

I had to stop them at one point, they were going too fast toward their destination, whatever it might be.

"Whoa!" I exclaimed. "Wait a minute. You can't pull Jennie out of school and ensconce her over there in the laboratory building just because you want her. There are such things as school laws and child labor laws here in California."

"Isn't that your problem, Mr. Kennedy?" Logart asked, with an undercurrent of impatience in his voice.

"Yes," I said reasonably. "And it's quite a problem. It's true that we have special provision for, say, child actors. The State gives special permission when adequate and compensating educational facilities are provided. I can set up the educational facilities without any trouble. The problem is this. The State Board understands about child actors. But what am I going to give the State as an excuse for taking Jennie out of regular school

and putting her to work in our factory?"

"It seems to me that the success or failure of Earth's first space ship is more important than some stupid motion picture," Logart said, with his impatience increasing.

"Ah," I said. "But now we're dealing with a framework of bureaucracy. Remember your military framework, *Mister* Logart. They're going to ask what has this little girl got so necessary to our success that the graduates of our finest technical universities don't have?"

"What is the procedure to deal with other unusual children?" he asked.

"There aren't supposed to be any unusual children," I said. "That's the whole point. There aren't supposed to be any unusual people of any kind, or any unusual circumstances. What did you do with those unusual young fellows you pulled into the services, *Colonel* Logart? You ground them down to complete conformity and mediocrity, or you destroyed them in trying. Now the disease is no longer confined to the military. Because nothing is done to reverse this process when the man has finished his term of service, it has saturated the whole culture."

All three of them were looking at me with different expressions. Jennie was politely waiting while an adult finished saying something she didn't understand. Swami was looking at me with eyebrows

cocked in puzzled surprise. Logart was patient, with a little smile that seemed comprised of both amusement and pity playing around his lips. I couldn't interpret it then, I didn't understand it until months later, when the pattern he was now developing finished in its inevitable result.

I was puzzled, too. At myself. I had never been particularly concerned for the ultimate fate of our culture, of mankind. I conceded that I didn't have many illusions left, but mine had always been an attitude of "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." Yet every time I came in contact with Logart, or even thought about him, I started getting up on a soapbox and philosophizing off into the blue yonder. And I was supposed to be the one who was skilled in keeping people on the subject until the matter in hand had been covered!

"What I'm saying," I supplemented a little lamely, because it wasn't what I'd been saying at all, "is that in dealing with a specific framework, you've got to make certain concessions to it, even though they prove a nuisance. Now I can see only one way to justify bringing Jennie here into the plant laboratory on a full-time basis, and that is in the role of a child actor. The State could understand that, because there's precedence. So we'll have to go through the process of making a motion picture record of the building of this spaceship. The

State will understand if we interpret that record through a child's eyes, because the State is convinced that the people have the minds of small children."

I started to swing into another diatribe about administrative attitudes of telling people only what the government thought the people ought to know, and keeping from them what they thought the people were too innocent to suspect—and resolutely closed my lips. Now that I had realized Logart's effect on me, I could at least be on guard. What effect did he have on others? Was he also arousing in them deep, latent concepts—abilities?

"As you say," he was conceding, "a motion picture record will be an added nuisance. But if it takes that to get up off the surface of the Earth, we'll do it." There was a vibrant chord of deep yearning, longing, in his voice.

"There will be quite a few such nuisances," I said drily.

IV

There were quite a few nuisances.

Not the least of them was the sudden withdrawal of George from the production departments of the factory. George had largely dispensed with red tape in favor of his more immediate form of communication. When George withdrew to concentrate on spaceship

plans, like a little boy who drops his tricycle and never gives it a backward glance when he sees daddy untying a real bike from the rear bumper of the car, this form of communication was suddenly cut off. Nobody knew what to do.

Red tape is not only communication, it is history. No one knew what to do, and from the few sparse records no one could tell what had been done.

The workers turned to their supervisors. Here were the machines, here was the blank stock. But what were they supposed to do with it? The supervisors turned to the production planning departments. Where are the work orders, the job tickets? Production Planning turned to Engineering. Where are the blueprints? Engineering turned to Plant Management. What are we supposed to be doing? Plant Management turned to General Management. Old Stone Face had nowhere to turn. It is one thing to build a huge organization one step at a time. It is something else to have five thousand idle employees turn at once and say, "What am I supposed to do?"

In this hectic period of readjustment which loaded me down with quarrels, complaints, grievances, I noticed a peculiar state of mind creeping over me. Ordinarily there is a joy in the skill of being able to juggle dozens of problems without dropping any of them to

smash, but there was no joy in this. I simply slugged through the days somehow. I put it down to overwork, overpressure, and the fact that I really wanted to be active in the preliminary stages of planning the spaceship. Compared with that, the job of getting the plant running smoothly again was sheer tedious drudgery.

All through the months I never really had any hand at all in the building of the spaceship. Peripheral nuisances kept me busy, a sort of picking up the pieces that Logart dropped as he pushed the project along. He never shoved me out of things. He just didn't need me at the central core, and there always seemed to be some emergency that prevented my real participation.

Such as the nuisance of getting a motion picture record started, the subterfuge that would give us Jennie without too many questions. This meant dealing with thirty-two more unions necessary to film a professional picture, to say nothing of State Boards, Local Boards, and Bureaucrats at every level. Anybody who still thinks we have free enterprise is living in a previous century. Simply making it possible for Jennie to get additional training from Logart kept me from sitting in on those sessions to see what was going on.

The nuisances piled up, and as customary around Computer Research the buck passes from hand

to hand until, somehow, it finally winds up on my desk. For instance there wasn't any reason why I should have got involved in the court actions that would condemn the adjoining property and give us more space. But I did.

One little old lady chose this particular time to decide that science had gone far enough. She picked up Asimov's famous sardonic jest made when the American satellite was first being publicly described: "If God had wanted basketballs to fly he'd have given them wings." She clung to it with literal sincerity, and talked about the Tower of Babel. Somehow the notion got fixed that if man left Earth, where he had been put to work out expiations for his sins, the whole plan of the universe would be destroyed. She had a lot of followers. The Press, treating it first as a joke, gradually began to concede she might have a point. And, although the court decreed against her, when she sat down in her little parlor with a shotgun across her lap and defied anybody to remove her bodily from her property—still hers no matter what a federal court judge said—our Public Relations Department somehow passed the buck to me. Rationalizing her into believing man was following out the predestined plan of the universe and science was proof that man was making progress in the expiation of his original sin took time. By the time

I finished, her house was a little island in a sea of bulldozers.

Old Stone Face didn't help any.

"I thought I was pretty well adapted," he said to me one day, "to the government attitude that a fellow isn't any kind of business manager at all if he can't make a ten-thousand-dollar item cost the tax payers a half million, but Ralph, the costs of this project are ridiculous."

Arguments that the more money we wasted the more profit we made, as is accepted custom, didn't sway his attempts to cut costs. The amazing Logart had somehow managed to pry open the Federal till so that we could just reach in and help ourselves. Old Stone Face insisted it wasn't the money, it was the principle of the thing. The more he tried to cut costs the greater the clamor and the more problems that somehow got piled on top of me.

I saw the land cleared, the spaceship hangar and side buildings arise without any help from me. By now, I seemed to be past caring.

When Logart insisted he had to have a laboratory separate from everything else, where only he, Jennie, Swami, and George could enter, and pointed out a private residence on the north side of our property he thought would do, somehow I took it for granted it was my problem to get it for him. Somehow, working through our legal department, of course, I did.

Somehow, I didn't ever get around to pointing out that the Personnel Director cannot be excluded from any company property; that the Personnel Director has the right to participate in any employee training program. After they moved into their new "laboratory" I never even got a peek inside it. The astonishing bit about that was that I couldn't seem to care.

I still thought it was because I was too busy!

The hull of the spaceship was well on its way to taking form before I realized that in the midst of all my headaches, there had *not* been the nuisance of trying to find a zillion experts. Now no matter how much of a genius a man may be, he can't know everything. A genius, perhaps more than anybody else, would want experts around if for no more than to check his work. It took me quite a while to realize that there was such a radical departure from all previous concepts of space flight that experts would simply be still more nuisance.

Well, George was the one who had to fly it. Let him plan it.

There was the nuisance also of trying to explain to our Public Relations Department, so they could explain to the Press, why the designs of a certain animated-cartoon manufacturer were not being followed in building our spaceship. No one else seemed to care whether Public Relations, and the

Press, got an answer to this important question.

But how could I explain that maybe a cartoonist didn't really know everything there was to know about designing a real spaceship? The public would never accept that. They had already accepted the cartoon design, and that was what they expected to see. They were paying for it, weren't they?

How could I explain something I didn't understand myself? For it didn't look like a spaceship to me, either. If anything, it more closely resembled a small apartment building!

One entered what was obviously a basement. You mean to tell me that small space off to the side is going to be the entire control room?!! Yes, I can see these are storage bins and closets, but if this thing should work won't you want to take it to the Moon? Maybe Mars and Venus? Where are you going to store enough food, and oxygen, and water? To say nothing of the thousand other necessities? Or, I suppose this is only a test model?

None of the answers Logart gave me were satisfactory. All seemed to boil down to not worrying my pretty little head about it. As for power units, well, Jennie really didn't take up much room, did she? There was a twinkle in his eye as he asked it, so I knew he was kidding. I hoped.

There was a shaft running upward through the center of the ceiling, but no elevator in it. A small flight of metal stairs wound around the open shaft, for ordinary people, like myself, to climb to the upper decks. On the first floor there were five apartments, small but as comfortably and completely equipped as a good house trailer. The second floor had an additional five apartments, and that was all.

This was a spaceship?

I preferred not to think about it. Of course I knew it wasn't going to be powered by any such thing as Jennie sitting over in a corner and psi-ing earnestly. Dr. Auerbach had already completed one large cylinder, about the size of a thirty-gallon water heater, and had delivered it to the laboratory building which Logart had demanded.

I didn't have to wonder very long whether Jennie and Swami, under Logart's specialized teaching, could make the cylinders work.

It was one mid-morning when I was on my way over from our regular plant to the section housing the space ship. Over to my right I saw the one-time residence, now Logart's laboratory, lift up off its foundations and float about a foot into the air. There was the rending sound of torn masonry, torn plumbing and sewer pipes, electrical wiring. Water started gushing out of the pipes, and as I ran toward the building, I remember

being thankful there were no gas lines.

The house settled back down slowly, but not quite straight, on its foundations. I ran up to the front door and pounded frantically on the panel. After a moment, Logart came and opened the door a mere crack.

"Yes?" he asked, as if I were a house-to-house salesman.

"It floated up into the air," I gasped.

"Yes?" There was still a question in his voice. What did I want?

"It broke your water mains, sewer connections, electrical wiring," I said lamely.

"Oh, yes," he answered a little absently. "I suppose it did. Would you be good enough to get them fixed, Kennedy?" he asked. He closed the door.

More nuisance.

A little later that morning, I saw the lift truck go over to the laboratory, and pick up the cylinder which had now been 'shunted out on the porch. From the way it lifted, I knew the cylinder was now inert. I didn't ask how it got out on the porch. There were five husky young men, besides Swami and Logart, in that building. I was sure they could have managed to get it out on the porch . . . somehow.

The lift truck carried the cylinder over to the ship—I still kept thinking of it as a compact apartment building—and installed it in

a rack on the north wall of the basement. There were similar racks on each of the other three walls, and Auerbach was completing, on order, three more such cylinders. I supposed there was some scientific reason for it. I had given up inquiring about it.

By now I was in a state of perpetual shock, partly from overwork and overworry about too many nuisances, partly because I understood just enough to understand that I didn't know anything at all. Such items, for example, as: Logart had insisted on a special formula of metal alloy to be made up in bars about the size of bricks. The idea seemed to be to pack as many molecules in as small a space as possible. I ventured, one day, to ask what they were for.

"Jennie-Swami's powers are limited," Logart said, a little sadly I thought. "They need molecules of some kind; can't make food, water, other things, out of nothing."

"Of course not," I said. I vaguely wondered what the term "other things" might cover. But I was past normal curiosity about anything. I didn't bother to ask.

"Swami's prescience is irregular," he said. "Your idea of increasing psi powers through hypnotism has its limits."

In these hectic months I had completely forgotten my intent to attempt hypnotism on psi. Apparently Logart hadn't.

"We don't know what we may

need before we come to matter again," he went on.

"Of course not," I agreed.

"So it's well to have plenty of molecules on hand," he said.

"Of course," I said. As if from forgotten childhood there came the memory of a fairy story about Little Three-Eyes. "Little table appear," she would say, and there would be a table laden with all the delicacies a hungry child can visualize. "Little table go away," she would say when she had eaten, and that took care of the automatic dishwasher problem. Three-Eyes? The third eye a psi-sense organ? The story founded on fact in some dim past? At the moment, it seemed to make their human needs all easy of fulfillment.

At the moment I didn't realize I was in a complete daze to the point that I would have readily agreed that when they grew hungry all they'd have to do is slice off a piece of the green-cheese moon.

The alloy bricks were completed and stacked in the "basement" until only corridors remained. The workmen doing it seemed never to have had any curiosity. Our Public Relations Department had failed completely with the Press, and the Press had settled in their own minds that the whole thing was a hoax. A congressional committee had promised to investigate the Pentagon's folly.

By now everyone had ceased to be curious. This was not unex-

pected on the part of the public. Conditioned by newspapers and television commentators to a new shock at least every three days, they responded by losing interest in anything after about three days. But it was surprising that those of us deeply involved should stop questioning.

I remember one curious conversation around this time. I didn't give it enough reflection at the time, possibly because it was with Swami, whose attitudes and opinions I respected least.

He came into my office with a sort of hang-dog look on his face and said he wanted to talk with me, to explain something to me.

"I don't—none of us want you to feel hurt," he said. "Afterwards."

"Afterwards what?" I asked.

"After this is all over."

"What am I not to feel hurt about?"

"Even explaining it is going to hurt you."

"Look, fellow," I said with a slight exasperation. "I've been at this game of dealing with human beings for a long time. I've been insulted in just about every way the mind of man can conceive. I've been lied to, cheated, double-crossed, lied about, and had the truth told about me. I've survived. I expect I can survive what you have to say."

"I suppose," he said slowly, "you've got a vocabulary of around twenty-five thousand words."

"More or less, perhaps," I conceded.

"And an equally large vocabulary of word combinations, and then another block of phrase combinations, so that all told you're probably capable of around a hundred thousand concepts. Say a hundred thousand for the sake of argument."

"For the sake of argument," I agreed.

"Suppose you found yourself living with a band of great apes who have a vocabulary of grunts, growls, roars, whistles, and chest beatings that number up to a hundred concepts. The ratio is a thousand to one, isn't it?"

I started to tell him he should have been a mathematician, but the look of sadness in his big black eyes stopped me.

"But for all your disproportionate ratio of concepts," he said, "you can still be hurt, get sick, feel a mosquito bite, get too cold, too hot, too hungry. You can only communicate to the limit of their hundred concepts. They judge you within these hundred concepts. They have no way of knowing or appreciating this vast number you can't communicate. To them you are a pretty worthless creature. You can't overpower them in a fight, you don't take an interest in their she-apes and fight over them, you don't try to become master of the herd because it wouldn't interest you, you don't appreciate the

delicacies of the grubs to be found under the bark of rotting trees; you're puny, sickly, and obviously you are also cowardly by their standards."

"But I've got a hundred thousand concepts—which makes me superior to them," I said.

"No," he disagreed. "Not superior, because what standard are you going by? Theirs, or yours?"

"Different then," I said.

"Different," he answered. "That's the point. Now suppose you found a group of human beings, your equals. Suppose you found a way to escape from the tribe of apes, to set up a community of human beings, so that your hundred thousand concepts had value. More important, so that you could start using them, and all they mean. Wouldn't you do it?"

"We're talking about psi, of course," I said, "and I see the analogy. But suppose the apes recognized my difference, recognized that I could think in areas denied to them. Suppose, for example, they saw the relation of the rotting tree to a supply of grubs under its bark. Suppose they tried to use my extra concepts, asked me to figure out a way to make more trees fall so there could be more grubs?"

"Would you really care?" he asked. "All right, suppose they invented another grunt which was a recognition of your difference. So now they've got a vocabulary of a hundred and one concepts. As

against your hundred thousand, would it make much difference to you?"

"Look, Swami," I said earnestly. "I've been trying to understand your psi talents. Not just to recognize them, but to understand them. All of them. I'm trying to find a way to bring them under scientific scrutiny, to work out an approach to the natural laws governing them, measure them, control them, predict them. They're real, they work—somewhere, in some way, they are a part of natural law. Man can understand natural law, if he tries. That's science."

He shook his head.

"A long time ago," he said, "we had a conversation along this line. I was offended then, and scared. I gave you some metaphysical mumbo jumbo. But my feelings, my psi feelings if you will, were sound. Maybe I can express it better this time. The flaw lies in what you call scientific method. Yes, psi is a part of natural law, but scientific method, as you conceive it, can't get hold of it. There has to be . . . There has to be . . ."

He paused. Obviously he was trying to find a grunt, whistle, or chest thump which was in my vocabulary.

"Let's go to another analogy," he said.

"Let's," I agreed.

"Suppose an ancient Greek philosopher met up with a modern solar scientist. Suppose this ancient

Greek said to the solar scientist, 'Tell me about the sun.' The solar scientist starts sketching in his basic knowledge of the sun. 'No, no!' the ancient Greek objects. 'Don't give me all that vague and mystical mumbo jumbo. That doesn't mean anything to me. Tell me how many wheels Apollo's chariot has, how many horses draw it across the sky, what metal the chariot is made of, what its dimensions are, what figures are embossed on its doors. Be scientific, man!' What could the solar scientist say?"

"In short," I said, "our science, in trying to measure psi, get a description of it, is like trying to measure a chariot that doesn't exist, driven by a god who doesn't exist."

"Yes."

"But psi does exist."

"The sun exists," he said. "It is the framework of approach to knowledge, to measurement that is wrong. Man couldn't learn anything more about the sun until he quit thinking in terms of Apollo's chariot."

It was an impasse. I couldn't give up my scientific approach to knowledge—any more than the ancient Greek could give up his certainty that Apollo drove his chariot across the sky.

As I say, I remembered the conversation, but I didn't reflect on it enough. I interpreted it as just Swami wanting to talk to some-

body, maybe build up his stock in my eyes since, obviously, I respected Jennie and George more than I did him. I didn't realize at the time that it was a kind of valedictory—from all of them.

I was much more concerned with the pressures of details that were weighing me down, and I fear my main reaction at the moment was irritation at the twenty minutes he'd taken up when other things were much more urgent.

Urgencies, for example, such as the details of their mass wedding. It didn't occur to me until much later that almost a year had passed since their announcement that they were going to get married—Annie and Swami, the boys and their girls. I'd not thought much about it, and if I did have a vague wonder now and then, I'd put the delay down to their being under white-hot pressures, too.

At any rate the multiple wedding finally did come off. Somehow the responsibility for that, too, got around to my office. But as usual, Sara was more capable of handling it than I would have been. I had only to officiate at the reception afterwards. The boys' parents were all there, the first time I'd met them; but somehow even they managed to pass the buck, and it was as if all these were my children.

After the reception, I had hardly enough energy left in me to stagger into my apartment. I was utterly

exhausted and in a slight fever.

"Did anybody think to make arrangements for their honeymoons?" I heard myself mumbling as I lay down across the bed to gather enough energy to get up and undress.

I fell asleep patiently telling myself that Sara would take care of it.

I was awakened by the telephone on the stand beside my bed, and with that dim realization that it had been ringing for a long time. Through grainy eyelids I could see outside my window that it was a bleak gray dawn. I hadn't bothered to snap off my light, pull down my shade, and I was still dressed.

"Aw for . . . Why don't you look up the right number?" I grumbled into the phone when I finally managed to reach out and claw it off its stand.

"Ralph! Ralph! Don't hang up. This is Henry!"

Old Stone Face's granite voice blasted me a little more awake.

"Yes, Henry," I groaned without that brisk, glad alertness right-hand men are expected to feel on any occasion.

"The ship's gone," he said. "Just got a call from Plant Security. Meet you there."

There was a crash in my ear as he slammed down the phone. Well, at least I didn't have to dress. A slept-in tuxedo was just fine for

going out to hunt a misplaced spaceship.

v

Henry and I pulled into the executives' parking section at the same time, and both of us spilled out of our cars and started running toward the spaceship hangar. A little knot of watchmen, security police, maintenance men had gathered at the doorway. They stepped back as we puffed our way up to the door and came to a halt. Yes, the spaceship was gone. The ceiling of the hangar was neatly folded back, as planned, to let the pink clouds and blue sky show through.

"Some honeymoon," I said to Henry.

"You think they'd have taken their wives?" he asked me.

"You think they'd have chosen this particular morning for a routine test run?" I asked him.

"You think they'd have risked their wives before they tested it?" he asked.

"You think they weren't absolutely sure of what they were doing all along?" I asked.

We weren't bothering to answer each other.

"We'd better check the laboratory. Logart's been sleeping there lately," Henry said. "Those kids could have taken it up as a lark, you know." He shook his head angrily. "This younger generation!" he grumbled.

The little knot of employees,

who had been crowding the doorway behind us, stepped back again and let us get out. They looked at us curiously, to see what we would do now. Executives were supposed to be able to handle anything, even spaceships that disappear.

We walked over toward the laboratory building that never had been straightened on its foundations. Neither of us seemed to be in any great hurry now. We went up on the porch and knocked politely at the door. We waited. No one answered our knock. There was no sound of movement inside. I tried the latch, and the door swung open without any trouble.

We peered into the hallway, and the house looked just as I remembered it when we bought it from its previous residents. As we stepped inside, I saw an envelope on the hall table. I looked at the front and saw it was addressed to me. I picked it up and carried it with me as we searched the house. There were no occupants, of course.

As we went from room to room a most peculiar realization came to me. In spite of my weariness, my lethargy was gone. I no longer felt numbly swept along in currents I could not understand or control. I was back to a state of mind I remembered, a state of being awake, and already the events of the last few months had the haze of a remembered dream.

"You feel unusually sharp this morning, Henry?" I asked as we

left the service porch area. He looked at me quickly.

"First I thought I was losing my grip because I got so I didn't care what was happening in building the spaceship," he said. "Then I got so I didn't care that I didn't care."

"Me too," I said. "Now I feel awake again."

"Me too," he said. Then added cryptically, "That Logart!"

We came into the living room. The chairs and divan were as neatly placed as in any home—Annie's work, no doubt. I hadn't been admitted to the house, but Annie had!

"This envelope is addressed to me," I said.

"Well, open it," Henry said.

We sat down in chairs, and I slipped a page out of the unsealed envelope. It was all neatly typed out. I had expected it to start with some such cliché as "When you read this, we will be gone," but Logart, whose signature was at the bottom, hadn't wasted words on the trivially obvious. I started reading aloud for Henry's benefit.

"A man can grow only so tall," Logart began. After that, he can merely grow fat. As with a man, so with a culture of man. When a culture has more to lose than to gain in trying to realize a dream, it is the dream that dies. When a culture starts walking backward into the future, with its eyes fixed on the past, the culture dies.

"A youth must leave his home and the parents who bore and cherished him or suffer the consequences of being never more than were his parents. History is full of the migrations of such youth groups. Youth groups with a dream that can only be realized where there is room for a dream to grow.

"Sorry you couldn't go with us, Kennedy. You tried. We tried. But what would life be like for you in a framework you could never share, where all your dependable patterns are no longer true, where all your wisdom of coping with people avails you nothing? For all your sympathy, you never quite believed that psi is an entirely different framework. You were always trying to make it conform to your already fixed notions of what truth must be.

"All of us will remember you with deep gratitude, for you brought together a critical psi mass. It needed only me to 'arrange' the parts into its dynamic potential. Jennie, Swami and George were, in a sense, your psi children. Be glad you gave them a good start.

"Somewhere, out among the stars, where there is room to grow, we will form a colony, and then a culture based in psi. Give us your blessing, and wish us luck.

Logart."

I looked up at Old Stone Face. He looked back at me.

"Too bad, Ralph," he said. He

sighed. He had helped, too. It was a disappointment that Logart had not given him credit. That Logart! "Well," he said finally, as if squaring his shoulders. "First thing is to get some breakfast. Next thing is to get that sluggish Public Relations Department waked up and working on some handouts for the Press, who, I guess, will sort of wake up now, too. Next thing-is to try to explain all this to the Pentagon, and how come we didn't stop them from taking the spaceship. Then there's Congress to explain to, why we used all that money they urged us to take. After all that's boiled down, and reflected itself in the voting machines, we still got computers to make."

"Why?" I asked.

"Now you look here, Ralphie, my boy," he said and shook his finger at me. It shocked me into an upright position. He didn't seem to notice, because his eyes were veiled as if he were looking into a far distance. "That Logart didn't have a corner on new frameworks. Maybe he's right about the old folks having grown too set in their ways to change, but there'll be other wild and independent children who want something different. You'll see.

"But first things first. Let's go get some breakfast."

We walked over to the plant cafeteria which does a brisk breakfast business in men whose wives are too lazy to get up and see them off

to work properly. There was a hush over the room, so still that the inadvertent clink of a spoon against a coffeecup sounded like a gong. The story had spread.

The sight of Henry and me, at one end of a long and otherwise empty table, calmly eating our stacks of hotcakes seemed to restore some confidence. If we could eat, then things might not be so bad. Henry had calculated the effect; and I should have, because that's my job. The cafeteria noise picked up until it reached normal, and provided a mask for the sound of our voices.

"Look here," Henry pointed a spoon at me. "Don't you give up. You were on the right track. It still takes unusual people to do unusual things. Don't sit around and sulk just because your unusual people did something unusual. You better get used to that. Remember that."

I stared down into the remaining syrup in the bottom of my plate.

Yes, I would remember. There might be other unusual people sometime in the future, but I could never forget Jennie, Swami, George. Logart was right. Now in remembrance and reflection, they were like children of mine. Children who, in the perfectly normal course of growing up, had been attracted to a fascinating stranger—for Logart would always remain a stranger in my inability to comprehend him—to go out into the

world, the universe, to make their own way apart from my protection, to build a new kind of life which I could never share.

But they had not taken everything. They'd left me something precious—remembrance, and reflection.

The complete tetralogy of Ralph Kennedy and his special employees will in time appear as a Gnome Press book; but if you're eager now to go back and read the highly entertaining details of the earlier episodes, you may find them as follows:

What Thin Partitions [Jennie Malasek], in collaboration with Alex Apostolides. *Astounding*, September, 1953. Reprints: *EDITOR'S CHOICE IN S.F.*, compiled by Sam Moskowitz (New York: McBride, 1954). *THE BEST S.-F. STORIES: 1954*, edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty (New York: Fell, 1954).

Sense from Thought Divide [the Swami]. *Astounding*, March, 1955. Reprint: *S-F: THE YEAR'S GREATEST*, edited by Judith Merrill (New York: Gnome-Dell, 1956).

How Allied [George]. *Astounding*, March, 1957.



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Richard Matheson has so far achieved his greatest popular success with his longer works; the screen version of THE SHRINKING MAN, indeed, accorded him the almost unheard-of honor of billing him in letters as large as those used for the producer. But Old Mathesonians—especially this one, who will never forget that fabulous day in 1949 when Born of Man and Woman turned up in the slush pile—feel that his most powerful and effective writing has been in shorter forms. Here is as short a story as Matheson has yet written—simple, direct, haunting . . .

Lemmings

by RICHARD MATHESON

"WHERE DO THEY ALL COME FROM?" Reordon asked.

"Everywhere," said Carmack.

They were standing on the coast highway. As far as they could see there was nothing but cars. Thousands of cars were jammed bumper to bumper and pressed side to side.

"There come some more," said Carmack.

The two policemen looked at the crowd of people walking toward the beach. Many of them talked and laughed. Some of them were quiet and serious. But they all walked toward the beach.

Reordon shook his head. "I don't get it," he said for the hundredth time that week. "I just don't get it."

Carmack shrugged.

"Don't think about it," he said. "It's happening. What else is there?"

"But it's crazy."

"Well there they go," said Carmack.

As the two policemen watched, the crowd of people moved across the gray sands of the beach and walked into the water. Some of them started swimming. Most of them couldn't because of their clothes. Carmack saw a young woman flailing at the water and dragged down by the fur coat she was wearing.

In several minutes they were all gone. The two policemen stared at the place where the people had walked into the water.

"How long does it go on?" Reordon asked.

"Until they're gone, I guess," said Carmack.

"But *why*?"

"You ever read about the lemmings?" Carmack asked.

"No."

"They're supposed to be rodents who live in the Scandinavian countries. They keep breeding until all their food supply is gone. Then they move across the country ravaging everything in their way. When they reach the sea they keep going. They swim until their strength is gone. Millions of them."

"You think that's what *this* is?" asked Reordon.

"Maybe," said Carmack.

"People aren't rodents!" Reordon said, angrily.

Carmack didn't answer.

They stood on the edge of the highway waiting but nobody appeared.

"Where are they?" asked Reordon.

"Maybe they've all gone in," Carmack said.

"All of them?"

"It's been going on for more than

a week," Carmack said. "People could have gotten here from all over. Then there are the lakes."

Reordon shuddered. "All of them," he said.

"I don't know," said Carmack, "but they've been coming right along until now."

"Oh, God," said Reordon.

Carmack took out a cigarette and lit it. "Well," he said slowly, "what now?"

Reordon sighed. "Us?" he said.

"You go," Carmack said. "I'll wait a while and see if there's anyone else."

"All right." Reordon put his hand out. "Goodby, Carmack," he said.

They shook hands. "Goodby, Reordon," Carmack said.

He stood smoking his cigarette and watching his friend walk across the gray sand of the beach and into the water until it was over his head. He saw Reordon swim a few dozen yards before he disappeared.

After a while he put out his cigarette and looked around. Then he walked into the water too.

A million cars stood empty along the beach.



A reviewer can't win for losing. If he doesn't write, the reviewed will exclaim, "Who's he to talk? He's not a writer." And if he is a writer, they'll say, "Who's he to talk? Look at his own stuff!" The book reviewer of Venture Science Fiction is at least safer than most in this respect; for Theodore Sturgeon's own stuff is, as a rule, just about the best science-fantasy being written today. I hope that reviewing remains only an avocation with him: the shrewdest criticism ever achieved in s.f. would be small repayment for the loss of such stories as this one, with a title that could fit the COLLECTED WORKS of Sturgeon:

A Touch of Strange

by THEODORE STURGEON

HE LEFT HIS CLOTHES IN THE CAR and slipped down to the beach.

Moonrise, she'd said.

He glanced at the eastern horizon and was informed of nothing. It was a night to drink the very airglow, and the stars lay lightless like scattered talc on the black-ground.

"Moonrise," he muttered.

Easy enough for her. Moonrise was something, in her cosmos, that one simply knew about. He'd had to look it up. You don't realize—certainly *she'd* never realize—how hard it is, when you don't know anything about it, to find out exactly what time moonrise is supposed to be, at the dark of the moon. He still wasn't positive, so

he'd come early, and would wait.

He shuffled down to the whispering water, finding it with ears and toes. "Woo." Catch m' death, he thought. But it never occurred to him to keep *her* waiting. It wasn't in her to understand human frailities.

He glanced once again at the sky, then waded in and gave himself to the sea. It was chilly, but by the time he had taken ten of the fine strong strokes which had first attracted her, he felt wonderful. He thought, oh well, by the time I've learned to breathe under water, it should be no trick at all to find moonrise without an almanac.

He struck out silently for the

blackened and broken teeth of rock they call Harpy's Jaw, with their gums of foam and the floss of tide-risen weed bitten up and hung for the birds to pick. It was oily calm everywhere but by the Jaw, which mumbled and munched on every wave and spit the pieces into the air. He was therefore very close before he heard the singing. What with the surf and his concentration on flanking the Jaw without cracking a kneecap the way he had that first time, he was in deep water on the seaward side before he noticed the new quality in the singing. Delighted, he trod water and listened to be sure; and sure enough, he was right.

It sounded terrible.

"Get your flukes out of your mouth," he bellowed joyfully, "you baggy old guano-guzzler."

"You don't sound so hot yourself, chum," came the shrill falsetto answer, "and you know what type fish-gut *chum* I mean."

He swam closer. Oh, this was fine. It wasn't easy to find a for-real something like this to clobber her with. Mostly, she was so darn perfect, he had to make it up whole, like the time he told her her eyes weren't the same color. Imagine, he thought, *they* get head-colds too! And then he thought, well, why not? "You mind your big bony bottom-feeding mouth," he called cheerfully, "or I'll curry your tail with a

scaling-tool." He could barely make her out, sprawled on the narrow seaward ledge—something piebald dark in the darkness. "Was that really you singin' or are you sitting on a blowfish?"

"You creak no better'n a straight-gut skua gull in a sewer sump," she cried raucously. "Whyn'cha swallow that sea-slug or spit it out, one?"

"Ah, go soak your head in a paddlewheel," he laughed. He got a hand on the ledge and heaved himself out of the water. Instantly there was a high-pitched squeak and a clumsy splash, and she was gone. The particolored mass of shadow-in-shade had passed him in midair too swiftly for him to determine just what it was, but he knew with a shocked certainty what it was not.

He wriggled a bare (*i.e.*, mere) buttock-clutch on the short narrow shelf of rock and leaned over as far as he could to peer into the night-stained sea. In a moment there was a feeble commotion and then a bleached oval so faint that he must avert his eyes two points to looward like a sailor seeing a far light, to make it out at all. Again, seeing virtually nothing, he could be sure of the things it was not. That close cap of darkness, night or no night, was not the web of floating gold for which he had once bought a Florentine comb. Those two dim blotches were not the luminous, over-long, wide-

spaced (almost side-set) green eyes which, laughing, devoured his sleep. Those hints of shoulders were not broad and fair, but slender. That salt-spasmed weak sobbing cough was unlike any sound he had heard on these rocks before; and the (by this time) unnecessary final proof was the narrow hand he reached for and grasped. It was delicate, not splayed; it was unwebbed; its smoothness was that of the plum and not the articulated magic of a fine-wrought golden watchband. It was, in short, human, and for a long devastated moment their hands clung together while their minds, in panic, prepared to do battle with the truth.

At last they said in unison, "But you're not—"

And let a wave pass, and chorused, "I didn't know there was anybody—"

And opened and closed their mouths, and said together, "Y'see, I was waiting for—" "Look!" he said abruptly, because he had found something he could say that she couldn't at the moment. "Get a good grip, I'll pull you out. Ready? One, two—"

"No!" she said, outraged, and pulled back abruptly. He lost her hand, and down she went in mid-gasp, and up she came strangling. He reached down to help, and missed, though he brushed her arm. "Don't touch me!" she cried, and doggy-paddled frantically to the rock on which he sat, and got

a hand on it. She hung there coughing until he stirred, whereupon: "Don't touch me!" she cried again.

"Well all right," he said in an injured tone.

She said, aloud but obviously to herself, "Oh, *dear* . . ."

Somehow this made him want to explain himself. "I only thought you should come out, coughing like that, I mean it's silly you should be bobbing around in the water and I'm sitting up here on the—" He started a sentence about he was only trying to be—, and another about he was *not* trying to be—, and was unable to finish either. They stared at one another, two panting sightless blots on a spume-slick rock.

"The way I was talking before, you've got to understand—"

They stopped as soon as they realized they were in chorus again. In a sudden surge of understanding he laughed—it was like relief—and said, "You mean that you're not the kind of girl who talks the way you were talking just before I got here. I believe you. . . . And I'm not the kind of guy who does it either. I thought you were a—thought you were someone else, that's all. Come on out. I won't touch you."

"Well . . ."

"I'm still waiting for the—for my friend. That's all."

"Well . . ."

A wave came and she took sud-

den advantage of it and surged upward, falling across the ledge on her stomach. "I'll manage, I'll manage," she said rapidly, and did. He stayed where he was. They stayed where they were in the hollow of the rock, out of the wind, four feet apart, in darkness so absolute that the red of tight-closed eyes was a lightening.

She said, "Uh . . ." and then sat silently masticating something she wanted to say, and swallowing versions of it. At last: "I'm not trying to be nosy."

"I didn't think you . . . Nosy? You haven't asked me anything."

"I mean staying here," she said primly. "I'm not just trying to be in the way, I mean. I mean, I'm waiting for someone too."

"Make yourself at home," he said expansively, and then felt like a fool. He was sure he had sounded cynical, sarcastic, and unbelieving. Her protracted silence made it worse. It became unbearable. There was only one thing he could think of to say, but he found himself unaccountably reluctant to bring out into the open the only possible explanation for her presence here. His mouth asked (as it were) while he wasn't watching it, inanely, "Is your uh friend coming out in uh a boat?"

"Is yours?" she asked shyly; and suddenly they were laughing together like a brace of loons. It was one of those crazy sessions people will at times find themselves con-

ducting, laughing explosively, achingly, without a specific punchline over which to hang the fabric of the situation. When it had spent itself, they sat quietly. They had not moved nor exchanged anything, and yet they now sat together, and not merely side by side. The understood attachment to someone — something — else had paradoxically dissolved a barrier between them.

It was she who took the plunge, exposed the Word, the code attachment by which they might grasp and handle their preoccupation. She said, dreamily, "I never saw a mermaid."

And he responded, quite as dreamily but instantly too: "Beautiful." And that was question and answer. And when he said, "I never saw a—" she said immediately, "Beautiful." And that was reciprocity. They looked at each other again in the dark and laughed, quietly this time.

After a friendly silence, she asked, "What's her name?"

He snorted in self-surprise. "Why, I don't know. I really don't. When I'm away from her I think of her as *she*, and when I'm with her she's just . . . *you*. Not you," he added with a childish giggle.

She gave him back the giggle and then sobered reflectively. "Now that's the strangest thing. I don't know *his* name either. I don't even know if they have names."

"Maybe they don't need them.

She—uh—they're sort of different, if you know what I mean. I mean, they know things we don't know, sort of . . . feel them. Like if people are coming to the beach, long before they're in sight. And what the weather will be like, and where to sit behind a rock on the bottom of the sea so a fish swims right into their hands."

"And what time's moonrise."

"Yes," he said, thinking, you suppose they know each other? you think they're out there in the dark watching? you suppose *he'll* come first, and what will he say to me? Or what if *she* comes first?

"I don't think they need names," the girl was saying. "They know one person from another, or just who they're talking about, by the feel of it. What's your name?"

"John Smith," he said. "Honest to God."

She was silent, and then suddenly giggled.

He made a questioning sound.

"I bet you say 'Honest to God' like that every single time you tell anyone your name. I bet you've said it thousands and thousands of times," she said.

"Well, yes. Nobody ever noticed it before, though."

"I would. My name is Jane Dow. Dee owe doubleyou, not Doe."

"Jane Dow. Oh! and you have to spell it out like that every single time?"

"Honest to God," she said, and they laughed.

He said, "John Smith, Jane Dow. Golly. Pretty ordinary people."

"Ordinary. You and your mermaid."

He wished he could see her face. He wondered if the merpeople were as great a pressure on her as they were on him. He had never told a soul about it—who'd listen?

Who'd believe? Or, listening, believing, who would not interfere? Such a wonder . . . and had she told all her girlfriends and boyfriends and the boss and what-not? He doubted it. He could not have said why, but he doubted it.

"Ordinary," he said assertively, "yes." And he began to talk, really talk about it because he had not, because he had to. "That has a whole lot to do with it. Well, it has everything to do with it. Look, nothing ever happened in my whole entire life. Know what I mean? I mean, nothing. I never skipped a grade in school and I never got left back. I never won a prize. I never broke a bone. I was never rich and never hungry. I got a job and kept it and I won't ever go very high in the company and I won't ever get canned. You know what I mean?"

"Oh, yes."

"So then," he said exultantly, "along comes this mermaid. I mean, to *me* comes a mermaid. Not just a glimpse, no maybe I did and maybe I didn't see a mermaid: this is a real live mermaid who wants me back again, time and

again, and makes dates and keeps 'em too, for all she's all the time late."

"So is *he*," she said in intense agreement.

"What I call it," he said, leaning an inch closer and lowering his voice confidentially, "is a touch of strange. A touch of strange. I mean, that's what I call it to myself, you see? I mean, a person is a person all his life, he's good to his mother, he never gets arrested, if he drinks too much he doesn't get in trouble he just gets excuse the expression sick to his stomach. He does a day's good work for a day's pay and nobody hates him or, for that matter, nobody likes him either. Now a man like that has no *life*; what I mean, he isn't *real*. But just take an ordinary guy-by-the-millions like that, and add a touch of strange, you see? Some little something he does, or has, or that happens to him, even once. Then for all the rest of his life he's *real*. Golly. I talk too much."

"No you don't. I think that's real nice, Mr. Smith. A touch of strange. A touch . . . you know, you just told the story of my life. Yes you did. I was born and brought up and went to school and got a job all right there in Springfield, and—"

"Springfield? You mean Springfield Massachusetts? That's my town!" he blurted excitedly, and fell off the ledge into the sea. He came up instantly and sprang up

beside her, blowing like a manatee.

"Well no," she said gently. "It was Springfield, Illinois."

"Oh," he said, deflated.

She went on, "I wasn't ever a pretty girl, what you'd call, you know, pretty: I wasn't repulsive either, I don't mean that. Well, when they had the school dances in the gymnasium, and they told all the boys to go one by one and choose a partner, I never got to be the first one. I was never the last one left either, but sometimes I was *afraid* I'd be. I got a job the day after I graduated high school. Not a good one, but not bad, and I still work there. I like some people more than other people, but not very much, you know? . . . A touch of strange. I always knew there was a name for the thing I never had, and you gave it a good one. Thank you, Mr. Smith."

"Oh that's all right," he said shyly. "And anyway, you have it now . . . how was it you happened to meet your . . . him, I mean?"

"Oh, I was scared to *death*, I really was. It was the company picnic, and I was swimming, and I—well, to tell you the actual truth, if you'll forgive me, Mr. Smith, I had a strap on my bathing suit that was, well, slippery. Please, I don't mean too *bad*, you know, or I wouldn't ever have worn it. But I was uncomfortable about it, and I just slipped around the rocks here to fix it and . . . there he was."

"In the daytime?"

"With the sun on him. It was like . . . like . . . There's nothing it was like. He was just lying here on this very rock, out of the water. Like he was waiting for me. He didn't try to get away or look surprised or anything, just lay there smiling. Waiting. He has a beautiful soft big voice and the longest green eyes, and long golden hair."

"Yes, yes. *She* has, too."

"He was *so* beautiful. And then all the rest, well, I don't have to tell *you*. Shiny silver scales and the big curvy flippers."

"Oh," said John Smith.

"I was scared, oh yes. But not *afraid*. He didn't try to come near me and I sort of knew he couldn't ever hurt me . . . and then he spoke to me, and I promised to come back again, and I did, a lot, and that's the story." She touched his shoulder gently and embarrassedly snatched her hand away. "I never told anyone before. Not a single living soul," she whispered. "I'm so glad to be able to talk about it."

"Yeah." He felt insanely pleased. "Yeah."

"How did you . . ."

He laughed. "Well, I have to sort of tell something on myself. This swimming, it's the only thing I was ever any good at, only I never found out until I was grown. I mean, we had no swimming pools and all that when I went to school. So I never show off about it or

anything, I just swim when there's nobody around much. And I came here one day, it was in the evening in summer when most everyone had gone home to dinner, and I swam past the reef line, way out away from the Jaw, here. And there's a place there where it's only a couple of feet deep and I hit my knee."

Jane Dow inhaled with a sharp sympathetic hiss.

Smith chuckled. "Now I'm not one for bad language. I mean I never feel right about using it. But you hear it all the time, and I guess it sticks without you knowing it. So sometimes when I'm by myself and bump my head or whatnot I hear this rough talk, you know, and I suddenly realize it's me doing it. And that's what happened this day, when I hurt my knee. I mean, I really hurt it. So I sort of scrouched down holding on to my knee and I like to boil up the water for a yard around with what I said. I didn't know anyone was around or I'd never.

"And all of a sudden there she was, laughing at me. She came porpoising up out of deep water to seaward of the reef and jumped up into that sunlight, the sun was low then, and red; and she fell flat on her back loud as your tooth breaking on a cherry-pip. When she hit, the water rose up all around her, and for that one second she lay in it like something in a jewel box, you know, pink satin

all around and her deep in it. "I was that hurt and confused and startled I couldn't believe what I saw, and I remember thinking this was some la—I mean, woman, girl like you hear about, living the life and bathing in the altogether. And I turned my back on her to show her what I thought of that kind of goings-on, but looking over my shoulder to see if she got the message, and I thought then I'd made it all up, because there was nothing there but her suds where she splashed, and they disappeared before I really saw them.

"About then my knee gave another twinge and I looked down and saw it wasn't just bumped, it was cut too and bleeding all down my leg, and only when I heard her laughing louder than I was cussing did I realize what I was saying. She swam round and round me, laughing, but you know? there's a way of laughing *at* and a way of laughing *with*, and there was no bad feeling in what she was doing.

"So I forgot my knee altogether and began to swim, and I think she liked that; she stopped laughing and began to sing, and it was . . ." Smith was quiet for a time, and Jane Dow had nothing to say. It was as if she were listening for that singing, or to it.

"She can sing with anything that moves, if it's alive, or even if it isn't alive, if it's big enough, like a storm wind or neaptide rollers. The way she sang, it was to my

arms stroking the water and my hands cutting it, and me in it, and being scared and wondering, the way I was . . . and the water on me, and the blood from my knee, it was all what she was singing, and before I knew it it was all the other way round, and I was swimming to what she sang. I think I never swam in my life the way I did then, and may never again, I don't know; because there's a way of moving where every twitch and wiggle is exactly right, and does twice what it could do before; there isn't a thing in you fighting anything else of yours. . . ." His voice trailed off.

Jane Dow sighed.

He said, "She went for the rocks like a torpedo and just where she had to bash her brains out, she churned up a fountain of white-water and shot out of the top of it and up on the rocks—right where she wanted to be and not breathing hard at all. She reached her hand into a crack without stretching and took out a big old comb and began running it through her hair, still humming that music and smiling at me like—well, just the way you said *he* did, waiting, not ready to run. I swam to the rocks and climbed up and sat down near her, the way she wanted."

Jane Dow spoke after a time, shyly, but quite obviously from a conviction that in his silence Smith had spent quite enough time on

these remembered rocks. "What . . . did she want, Mr. Smith?"

Smith laughed.

"Oh," she said. "I do beg your pardon. I shouldn't have asked."

"Oh please," he said quickly, "it's all right. What I was laughing about was that she should pick on me—me of all people in the world—" He stopped again, and shook his head invisibly. No, I'm not going to tell her about that, he decided. Whatever she thinks about me is bad enough. Sitting on a rock half the night with a mermaid, teaching her to cuss . . . He said, "They have a way of getting you to do what they want."

It is possible, Smith found, even while surf whispers virtually underfoot, to detect the cessation of someone's breathing; to be curious, wondering, alarmed, then relieved as it begins again, all without hearing it or seeing anything. *What'd I say?* he thought, perplexed; but he could not recall exactly, except to be sure he had begun to describe the scene with the mermaid on the rocks, and had then decided against it and said something or other else instead. Oh. Pleasing the mermaid. "When you come right down to it," he said, "they're not hard to please. Once you understand what they want."

"Oh yes," she said in a controlled tone. "I found that out."

"You did?"

Enough silence for a nod from her.

He wondered what pleased a merman. He knew nothing about them—nothing. His mermaid liked to sing and to be listened to, to be watched, to comb her hair, and to be cussed at. "And whatever it is, it's worth doing," he added, "because when they're happy, they're happy up to the sky."

"Whatever it is," she said, disagreeably agreeing.

A strange corrosive thought drifted against his consciousness. He batted it away before he could identify it. It was strange, and corrosive, because of his knowledge of and feeling for, his mermaid. There is a popular conception of what joy with a mermaid might be, and he had shared it—if he had thought of mermaids at all—with the populace . . . up until the day he met one. You listen to mermaids, watch them, give them little presents, cuss at them, and perhaps learn certain dexterities unknown, or forgotten, to most of us, like breathing under water—or, to be more accurate, storing more oxygen than you thought you could, and finding still more (however little) extractable from small amounts of water admitted to your lungs and vaporized by practiced contractions of the diaphragm, whereby some of the dissolved oxygen could be coaxed out of the vapor. Or so Smith had theorized after practicing certain of the mermaid's ritual exercises.

And then there was fishing to be eating, and fishing to be fishing, and hypnotizing eels, and other innocent pleasures.

But innocent.

For your mermaid is as oviparous as a carp, though rather more mammalian than an echidna. Her eggs are tiny, by honored mammalian precedent, and in their season are placed in their glittering clusters (for each egg looks like a tiny pearl imbedded in a miniature moonstone) in secret, guarded grottos, and cared for with much ritual. One of the rituals takes place after the eggs are well rafted and have plated themselves to the inner lip of their hidden nest; and this is the finding and courting of a merman to come and, in the only way he can, father the eggs.

This embryological sequence, unusual though it may be, is hardly unique in complexity in a world which contains such marvels as the pelagic phalange of the cephalopods and the simultaneity of disparate appetites exhibited by certain arachnids. Suffice it to say, regarding mermaids, that the legendary monosyllable of greeting used by the ribald Indian is answered herewith; and since design follows function in such matters, one has a guide to one's conduct with the lovely creatures, and they, brother, with you, and with you, sister.

"So gentle," Jane Dow was saying, "but then, so rough."

"Oh?" said Smith. The corrosive thought nudged at him. He flung it somewhere else, and it nudged him there, too. . . . It was at one time the custom in the Old South to quiet babies by smearing their hands liberally with molasses and giving them a chicken feather. Smith's corrosive thought behaved like such a feather, and pass it about as he would he could not put it down.

The merman now, he thought wildly . . . "I suppose," said Jane Dow, "I really am in no position to criticize."

Smith was too busy with his figurative feather to answer.

"The way I talked to you when I thought you were . . . when you came out here. Why, I never in my life—"

"That's all right. You heard *me*, didn't you?" Oh, he thought, suddenly disgusted with himself, it's the same way with her and her friend as it is with me and mine. Smith, you have an evil mind. This is a nice girl, this Jane Dow.

It never occurred to him to wonder what was going through her mind. Not for a moment did he imagine that she might have less information on mermaids than he had, even while he yearned for more information on mermen.

"They *make* you do it," she said. "You just have to. I admit it; I lie awake nights thinking up new nasty names to call him. It makes him so happy. And he loves to do

it too. The . . . things he says. He calls me 'alligator bait.' He says I'm his squashy little bucket of roe. Isn't that awful? He says I'm a milt-and-water type. What's milt, Mr. Smith?"

"I can't say," hoarsely said Smith, who couldn't, making a silent resolution not to look it up. He found himself getting very upset. She seemed like such a nice girl. . . . He found himself getting angry. She unquestionably *had* been a nice girl.

Monster, he thought redly. "I wonder if it's moonrise yet."

Surprisingly she said, "Oh dear. Moonrise."

Smith did not know why, but for the first time since he had come to the rock, he felt cold. He looked unhappily seaward. A ragged, wistful, handled phrase blew by his consciousness: *save her from herself*. It made him feel unaccountably noble.

She said faintly, "Are you . . . have you . . . I mean, if you don't mind my asking, you don't have to tell me . . ."

"What is it?" he asked gently, moving close to her. She was huddled unhappily on the edge of the shelf. She didn't turn to him, but she didn't move away.

"Married, or anything?" she whispered.

"Oh gosh no. Never. I suppose I had hopes once or twice, but no, oh gosh no."

"Why not?"

"I never met a . . . well, they all . . . You remember what I said about a touch of strange?"

"Yes, yes . . ."

"Nobody had it. . . . Then I got it, and . . . put it this way, I never met a girl I could tell about the mermaid."

The remark stretched itself and lay down comfortably across their laps, warm and increasingly audible, while they sat and regarded it. When he was used to it, he bent his head and turned his face toward where he imagined hers must be, hoping for some glint of expression. He found his lips resting on hers. Not pressing, not cowering. He was still, at first from astonishment, and then in bliss. She sat up straight with her arms braced behind her and her eyes wide until his mouth slid away from hers. It was a very gentle thing.

Mermaids love to kiss. They think it excruciatingly funny. So Smith knew what it was like to kiss one. He was thinking about that while his lips lay still and sweetly on those of Jane Dow. He was thinking that the mermaid's lips were not only cold, but dry and not completely flexible, like the carapace of a soft-shell crab. The mermaid's tongue, suited to the eviction of whelk and the scything of kelp, could draw blood. (It never had, but it could.) And her breath smelt of fish.

He said, when he could, "What were you thinking?"

She answered, but he could not hear her.

"What?"

She murmured into his shoulder, "His teeth all point inwards."

Aha, he thought.

"John," she said suddenly, desperately, "there's one thing you must know now and forever more. I know just how things were between you and *her*, but what you have to understand is that it wasn't the same with me. I want you to know the truth right from the very beginning, and now we don't need to wonder about it or talk about it ever again."

"Oh you're fine," John Smith choked. "So fine. . . . Let's go. Let's get out of here before—before moonrise."

Strange how she fell into the wrong and would never know it (for they never discussed it again),

and forgave him and drew from that a mightiness; for had she not defeated the most lawless, the love-liest of rivals?

Strange how he fell into the wrong and forgave her, and drew from his forgiveness a lasting pride and a deep certainty of her eternal gratitude.

Strange how the moon had risen long before they left, yet the mermaid and the merman never came at all, feeling things as they strangely do.

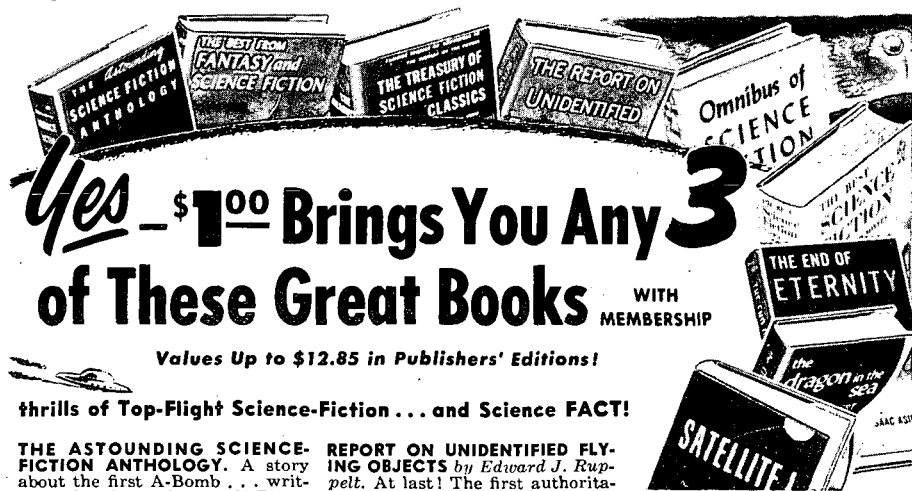
And John swam in the dark sea slowly, solicitous, and Jane swam, and they separated on the dark beach and dressed, and met again at John's car, and went to the lights where they saw each other at last; and when it was time, they fell well and truly in love, and surely that is the strangest touch of all.

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